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PRIVATE EYE

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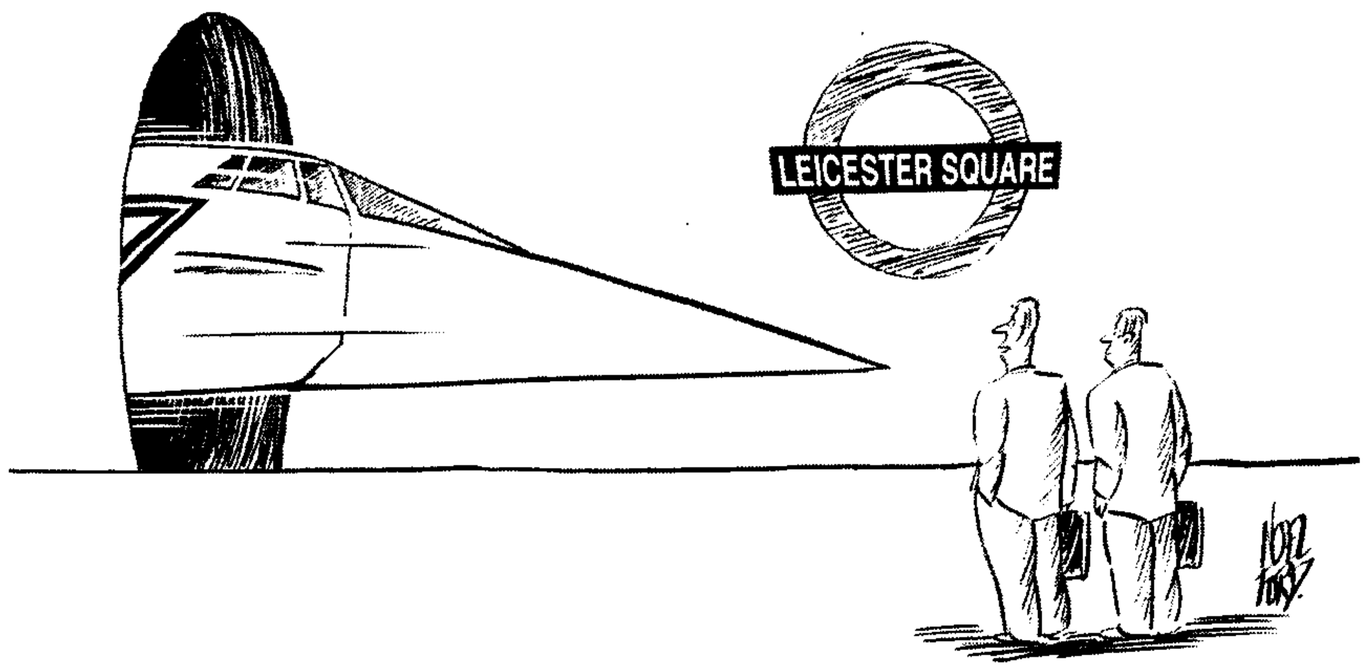

You have to hand it to Ken...

wisdom

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Gnome

THE lifting of the injunction against my organ marks a victory for free speech and the right of the Fourth Estate to pursue its time-honoured role of serving the public of this country.

As a result of the court's sensible decision, we are now able to tell the public the full story about the story we are not able to tell them.

Other less responsible newspapers have been full of prurient innuendo and barely concealed references to the story that we cannot tell you, printing headlines such as "Charles Cock And Bull Story", "Another Blow For Charles" and "Poofy Prince Caught At It".

We however at the Daily Gnomian on Sunday have chosen to maintain a dignified silence over the unproven allegations of Charles' involvement in a sexual act with a male member of his staff. We believe that there is not a single shred of credible evidence in these stories, but we maintain that the public has a right to know what these untrue stories are, so that they can decide for themselves that they are untrue.

That is why it is our vital and, indeed, sacred duty, to publish as much filth as we can without getting sued in the hope of selling millions of papers.

E. Strobes,
pp. Lord Gnome

Important Announcement!

The Daily Gnome now comes in 2 sizes – normal Broadsheet A4 and new Tabloid A4. You decide!
(Available only in Neasden and the Orkneys)

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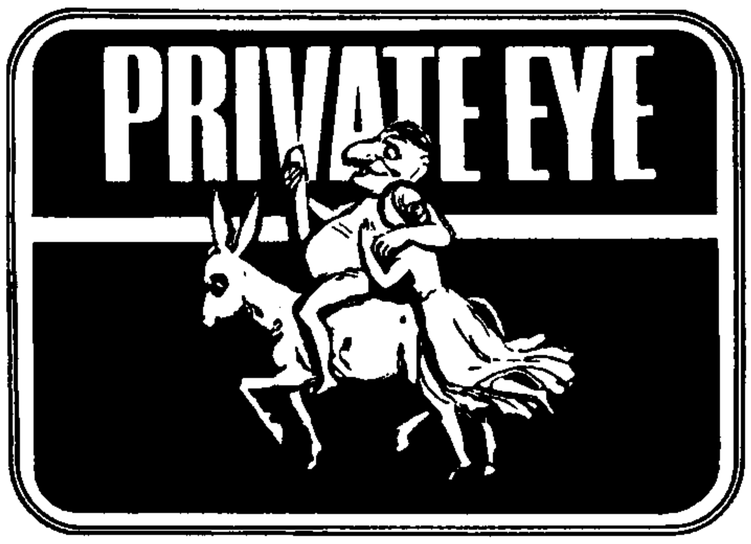

Windsors and losers

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ONE day the Iraqis may well throw rose petals at the occupying forces... but it won't be any day soon to judge by the latest shopping list of the Coalition Provisional Authority.

When Iraq's police reappeared on the streets after Saddam's fall, they were armed with pistols. As if there weren't enough guns in Iraq already, they now need more substantial hardware; which is why the coalition website is soliciting quotes for 12-bore pump-action "police model shotguns" with "black synthetic stocks". The CPA also wants the Iraq police to have two kinds of rifles: guns that can fire both single shot and fully automatic (or at least "three round bursts") from their 30-round magazines, as well as bolt-action "tactical" (sniper) rifles.

The Iraqi police were initially given new blue uniforms to replace their militaristic green shirts. But the CPA is now trying to buy them riot gear too – not to mention 50,000 brand new AK-47 assault rifles for the reformed Iraqi army.

If any *Eye* readers have assault rifles, shotguns or sniper rifles spare that they can ship to Baghdad International Airport, please contact Eric J. Bankit at the Republican Presidential Compound, Baghdad.

POLICE and prison staff wonder why the expensive court complex built alongside Belmarsh prison specifically to try high risk prisoners is not being used for the trial of Ian Huntley, accused of murdering Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman.

Huntley is being held in adjoining Belmarsh prison, which is linked to the court complex by a secure tunnel. However, every day at huge cost and temporarily bringing London's roads to a standstill, Huntley – considered to be at risk of attack – is swept along under heavy police escort from south-east London to the Old Bailey.

His girlfriend Maxine Carr, accused of perverting the course of justice and assisting an offender, meanwhile, is whisked in from Holloway jail in north London. Belmarsh has a unit which is often converted to detain women.

Some observers estimate these added security costs at about £50,000 a week for a trial which is expected to last anything up to three months. But then Belmarsh in a remote part of south-east London is hardly a suitable setting for a show trial and is very difficult for the judges, barristers and hacks to get to.

AS Bradford's ailing education private finance initiative (PFI) hit the headlines this week thanks to its 45 schools with "serious difficulties", at least the company running the education authority is helping headteachers get away from the stressful mess.

Serco, which runs Education Bradford, has found an ingenious way to win the hearts of school leaders, many of whom after two years of declining standards and budget problems have begun to doubt seriously that the wholesale privatisation of schools was a good thing.

Heads from 13 Bradford schools are currently visiting the sunny Caribbean island of Barbados, courtesy of Serco. The trip is ostensibly to help the heads combat under-achievement by African-Caribbean pupils. But the head of Idle CE Primary, Richard Liddington, told the *Bradford Telegraph and Argus* before leaving on the jaunt that he had only one African-Carribean pupil in his entire school. The trip is jointly funded by Serco Learning and a charity, the League of Exchange of Commonwealth Teachers.

Schools minister David Miliband is meeting Bradford MPs this week to discuss the crisis in the city's education system which follows Serco bidding to run the service on the cheap. The LEA has also been haemorrhaging support staff and both its educational psychology and educational social worker teams are currently at half strength.

Earlier this year Education Bradford had to ask for achievement targets to be lowered after it gained less than one incentive point out of 87 available for 2001-2. Each point would have been worth a £10,000 bonus payment.

FLUSHED with success at the sale of Inland Revenue and Customs buildings to a company in a tax haven, the government has been searching around for more property it can flog off at bargain basement prices.

Ministers at the department of work and pensions have led the field with a plan to sell nine million square feet of Jobcentres to a big property speculating company at prices so ridiculously low they have shocked even the Tories and the Liberal Democrats.

Asked on 29 October by Lord Oakeshott whether the government had put the contract out to tender, the DWP minister Baroness Hollis, a former leader of Norwich council and left-wing historian, replied that no, it hadn't. She explained: "Only Land Securities Trillium was invited to submit a formal proposal."

She went on: "The final negotiated package is deemed to offer DWP an overall price that compares very favourably with external benchmarks." Really? Lord Oakeshott doesn't agree. He has noticed certain sales of individual freeholds of Jobcentres at sale prices five times higher than the average price, and believes the government has landed the taxpayer with another huge PFI burden over the next 15 years.

Among those who are inclined to agree with him are the financial analysts. In a report dated 15 October, Smith Barney of Citigroup concluded: "In our view this is good news for the company" and estimated the contract would add 25p to every share.

"There's a ridiculous rumour going round that you're going to be king"

Street of Shame

THE *Daily Mail* found it hard to disguise its shock at 30-year-old James Murdoch's unopposed ascension to the top seat at BSkyB. "His rise to the top job in the world's most successful satellite television group is astonishing and is being seen as a coup d'etat for the Murdoch family," the paper told readers in a breathless unbylined piece describing what they called a "fiasco".

"This is not the first time Murdoch, 72, has installed a family member at BSkyB. His daughter Elisabeth spent four years there and was promoted to programming chief… Elder son Lachlan is deputy chief operating officer of News Corp."

As fans of the hereditary principle are well aware, the chairman of the *Daily Mail*'s parent company is none other than the fourth Viscount Rothermere, who inherited the job from his father at the age of 31. His position is unchallengable, given that 59 percent of the company's ordinary shares are held by members of his family, who have absolute control of the business through restrictions on voting rights. (Anyone wishing to know more about his family's role in the business is advised to contact the company's director of corporate affairs: Lord Rothermere's cousin, Vyvyan Harmsworth.)

SEVERAL *Daily Telegraph* readers have asked Lord Gnome to elucidate the policy of new editor Martin Newland on pin-ups. Despite his promise of no more gratuitous photographs of bikini-clad lovelies on the news pages, there seem to be just as many of them as in the flesh-crazed era of Charles "Phwooar" Moore. So, they ask, what has changed?

The difference is that Newland operates an equal-opportunity policy. As a serious body-builder himself, he has a healthy (though heterosexual) appreciation of the male physique and believes that readers are entitled to one hunk for every starlet. Hence all those huge topless pictures of England's rugby stars; hence, too, the photo of a naked male naturist atop an otherwise dull news story about the National Trust last Saturday. "More beefcake!" he told a stunned editorial conference.

HOW fares the "Fund for Frank", Rebekah Wade's charity appeal on behalf of people with mental health problems? Although it was launched with a front-page fanfare at the end of September, there has been a surprising lack of progress reports.

The fund was, of course, a desperate attempt by Wade to placate all those who had protested at the previous day's front-page splash, which derided Bruno as "bonkers" and a "nut". But despite the moist-eyed sincerity with which she urged *Sun* readers to give generously, it seems even they weren't mutton-headed enough to fall for that one.

The *Eye* has learnt that the total raised so far is somewhat less than £30,000. But most of that came in on day one as part of Rebekah's damage-limitation stunt – £10,000 from the *Sun* itself, plus £15,000 which she extracted from Frank's "pals" Richard Branson, Frank Warren and Stephen Purdew. The *Sun* agreed to make a further four-figure donation as its "fee" for an exclusive interview with Bruno's ex-wife Laura.

So how much have ordinary readers given? Rumour at Wapping suggests that the grand total is… £36.

A spokeswoman for SANE, which administers the fund, thinks that might be a slight underestimate. "It hasn't been a significantly large amount we've received from *Sun* readers," she says, "but it's certainly more than 36 quid."

Maybe £100, then?

Speed hating

FREELANCE hack Graham Bowley writes a tragic story in the Weekend *Financial Times*. His Ukrainian wife and their daughter have made him a stranger in his own home, since Mrs B. insists on speaking only Ukrainian to the child and Bowley's grasp of the language is "minimal".

Not only are he and his parents forbidden to speak English to his daughter, but his wife and daughter make fun of him in Ukrainian. And now his non-English-speaking mother-in-law has moved in too!

And who is Mrs Bowley? Step forward Chrystia Freeland – deputy editor of, er, the *FT*. Curiously, Bowley's piece neglected to mention that although his wife may be a linguistic tyrant she does at least continue to give her wretched husband lucrative freelance writing assignments.

DAVID "the Slug" Sullivan has found a new and potentially lucrative way of bankrolling his empire, which includes a digital TV channel, the *Sport* newspapers and Birmingham City FC.

Normally when Sullivan boasts that something is "the first of its kind in the UK" some scepticism is justified. But this time it's probably true. Certainly nobody else seems to be flogging a DVD titled *British Girls Pee in Berlin*. For a mere £30, punters can see "top quality British babes in some real hardcore pissing action".

Although the "action" is of course illegal, the DVD has been granted an R18 certificate by the classifiers – and no doubt it'll do wonders for the image of British tourists abroad. "Filmed in Berlin, see Kelly and her pals pissing in a video store, café, car park and other public places." Apparently, "these girls just can't stop pissing. Non-stop wet knicker action. SUPERB."

The arrival of this remarkable motion picture gives the lie to claims that the British film industry is in crisis. It will surely dominate next year's Bafta awards.

ULRIKA Jonsson, in true Glenda Slagg style, has used her *News of the World* column to have a go at Girls Aloud singer Cheryl Tweedy – or "Seedy" as she's dubbed – for getting drunk and hitting a toilet attendant.

"She has let drink and fame go to her head," the columnist declares, calling Tweedy an "arrogant bully" and "abysmal example to young women".

On the other side of the page, meanwhile, Ulrika has a change of heart about drunken celebs hitting people. This time the target of her wrath is David Gest, who is suing his estranged wife Liza Minnelli for "physical abuse". According to Ulrika, Liza's behaviour in allegedly beating up Gest was quite understandable, since she's a "vulnerable alcoholic". Setting a fine example to young women, Ulrika adds: "I could almost slap him myself."

Tweedy, meanwhile, used an interview in the *Sun* to rehabilitate her seedy image – with little success. Beneath the ambiguous headline "I'm not a racist – the guys I go for are mixed race", she told hackette Victoria Newton just what she thought of Ulrika. "She just needs to take a look at herself and watch out if she ever bumps into me."

WHAT prompted the *News of the World* to print its one and only theatre review in the past year on 19 October?

It surely couldn't have been the play – *The Taming of the Shrew*, one of Shakespeare's most problematic and least-staged comedies. And it was not its glittering venue: the production was far from the West End, touring round such glamorous locations as Guildford, Norwich and Bradford.

Could the sole appearance of the paper's "at the theatre" column – complete with its own dinky little comedy and tragedy masks logo – have anything to do with the star of the production under review, Ross Kemp, aka Grant Mitchell, being the husband of *Sun* and ex-*News of the World* editrix Rebekah Wade and a close friend of current *Screws* editor Andy Coulson?

COURT CIRCULAR

THE royal spin machine – not the slickest at the best of times – is struggling desperately to cope with the latest bout of gossip, innuendo and injunction. Senior flunkeys can only look on helplessly as Paul Burrell is joined by Michael Fawcett and George Smith on Buckingham Palace's "most wanted" list.

As the papers kicked against being prevented from revealing the alleged facts of a peculiar practice between a "senior royal" and his servant, the palace maintained its usual policy of ignoring the problem and hoping it would go away. At Clarence House, however, the atmosphere was much less calm. And once the *Guardian* named Michael Fawcett as the man who had obtained the injunction, it reacted with uncharacteristic panic.

Courtiers were stunned when Sir Michael Peat, Charles's private secretary, went live on television to name his boss as the royal involved in the story – and then denied there was any truth at all in the allegations he couldn't mention. The Queen was livid when informed of Peat's broadcast. Having viewed a recording she ordered her private secretary, Sir Robin Janvrin, to contact Clarence House and find out what was going on. If necessary, as Charles was out of the country, Janvrin was told to take charge of the rebuttal process himself. Peat assured Janvrin that Charles had authorised the broadcast, but Charles was still only vaguely aware of what was going on back home and had told Peat to "contain" the matter. When he realised that Peat had given a TV broadcast, rather than just issuing a press release, Charles, too, went up the wall and took time out to phone both Fawcett and his former spinner Mark Bolland. The two men Peat most detests – having blamed them for causing the chaos in the way Charles's household was run – were once again in direct contact with the prince.

Peat's decision to start rubbishing George Smith, the former valet who was the eyewitness to the alleged incident, also surprised senior flunkeys who felt this course was "ungentlemanly" and might very well backfire. The palace was equally concerned that rubbishing Smith was only a step short of rubbishing Diana – who recorded Smith's allegations on tape – as a sort of "princess of blackmail". Peat was told to back off.

Brenda, once she heard George Smith's allegations in full, had no hesitation in siding with Charles. But she couldn't understand why Clarence House didn't just come clean and tell the story it had been rebutting, and then begin rebuilding. The trouble is, no one can tell the story while Michael Fawcett has the injunction in place. And he seems in no hurry to see it lifted.

'Flunkey'

MAN OF the moment Mark Bolland, Prince Charles' ex-friend and spin doctor, was extremely censorious of the News of the World in an interview with the *Guardian* last month, blaming the Screws for the inaccuracy of the *News of the World*'s story about Prince Harry's drug taking last year.

According to the paper, Harry was taken to the Featherstone Lodge rehab centre by his father so he could see the error of his ways after a drugs binge in the summer of 2001. Actually, he only embarked on his dope-smoking escapades *after* his father had taken him to the centre, as Bolland admitted to the *Guardian*. "Presenting the centre as the great solution to the problem was something that I was embarrassed about. It was misleading… They presented it in a far more triumphalist manner than was justified."

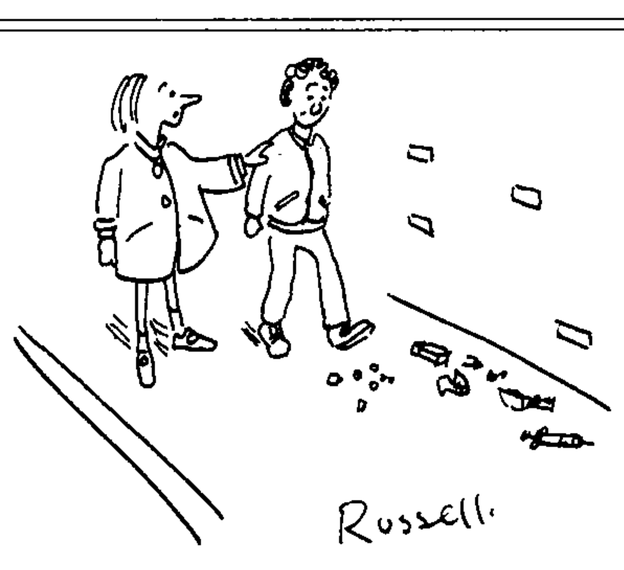
Oddly, Bolland was not embarrassed enough to complain to the paper's then editor, Rebekah Wade, with whom he had holidayed in Tuscany the very summer that Harry was sparking up at Highgrove. Neither did he feel the need to make a complaint to the press complaints commission (PCC), headed by one Guy Black, who happens to be the partner of… Mark Bolland. Nor did he explain why he had chosen to kick up a fuss about the issue with his first ever newspaper interview more than 18 months after the story appeared.

The depth of his displeasure with the paper was demonstrated, however, by an announcement two days after the interview appeared: Bolland had signed up to write a weekly column for, er, the *News of the World*. He claimed that the move into journalism was part of his desire to "move on" from royal issues – as was amply demonstrated by his second piece for the paper last Sunday, splashed on the front page under the headline "IS CHARLES BISEXUAL?"

***GUARDIAN* editor and Harry Potter lookalike Alan Rusbridger was careful to maintain that his legal battle to name the royal servant involved in the mysterious "controversial incident" was not undertaken for prurient reasons.**

Instead, he claimed, the paper's victory had "significant implications for freedom of expression"; and he dissociated his own high-minded organ from the "current bitter battle between scandal-hungry tabloids and an increasingly bruised royal household". His paper the next day was even more sanctimonious: "This newspaper is not publishing the actual allegations. Not only do they differ from the highly coloured rumours about royal affairs which have surfaced recently in the tabloids: but we also have no reason to believe the allegations are true."

That has not stopped the *Guardian* from endless speculation about sexual shenanigans in the royal household since Paul Burrell started spilling the beans last year, culminating on 28 October in the high-minded *Grauniad* devoting the cover of its G2 section and two pages inside to the "royal secret so 'shocking' and 'disgusting' that it would cause irreparable damage to the monarchy." Writers Blake Morrison and Hadley Freeman detailed the allegation in a way that, thanks to Michael Fawcett's injunction, is no longer legally possible. The sober and disinterested *Grauniad* headline? "What? You mean you don't know the secret on the royal rape tape?"



"Careful! It's bad luck to tread on the crack on the pavement"

HACKWATCH

Sic Transit Tory

20 September: The Conservatives have been given a bloody nose at the Brent East by-election, but reassurance is offered by the *Sun*'s deputy political editor George Pascoe-Watson. "Iain Duncan Smith will survive the defeat – there is no serious mood for revolt in Tory ranks," he reports.

21 September: Reflecting on the lessons of Brent East, Matthew D'Ancona of the *Sunday Telegraph* argues that the Tories' most urgent duty is "to accept that Mr Duncan Smith is their leader, that they themselves elected him in 2001, and that he passed handsomely the test set by his own mutinous party in the May local elections. All talk of a leadership contest now is strictly for the birds: IDS will lead the Tories into the general election, whatever such giants of our time as David Mellor may think to the contrary."

7 October: As a former Tory MP, the *Independent* columnist Michael Brown ought to know a thing or two. Alas! At what should have been his moment of glory he loses his nerve. "At the beginning of the year," Brown recalls, "I predicted IDS would be dumped by his party during the course of 2003. But the fact that he survived the furore surrounding his dismissal of party officials loyal to Michael Portillo suggests that Tory MPs now lack the bottle or courage to put their heads above the parapet. IDS may be the 'quiet man' but he is remarkably tenacious."

9 October: From the Tory conference in Blackpool, the *Daily Mail* political correspondent Paul Eastham updates readers on the state of the anti-IDS conspiracy. "Leading plotters expect to make their move against him in the middle of November," he discloses. "It will take some weeks to win the backing of their constituency associations before putting their heads above the parapet… 'They are scared of launching a head-on challenge,' one source said. 'They want him to stand down in a bloodless coup. This will be anything but bloodless… It will be bloody, prolonged and damaging.'"

10 October: Those who hoped to oust IDS have been thwarted. "It was such an incompetent plot, the Quiet Man might have paid them to mount it," Paul Eastham sneers in the *Mail*. "It produced a week of horrible headlines for the Tory leader. But fatal flaws in the intriguers' strategy meant this attempted putsch was doomed to fail… Far from destroying the enemy, the malcontents, who fear IDS is leading them to an electoral wipeout, contrived to send him away from Blackpool strengthened."

15 October: The high-minded *Times* pundit Peter Riddell refuses to discuss the "trivial allegations" about secretarial payments to IDS's wife. "The current row is a diversion from the central question of whether Mr Duncan Smith can lead the Tories to success at the next general election." So what's the answer to this central question? "At present, he does not look like a winner. That, of course, is a long way from saying that Mr Duncan Smith will face a leadership challenge… There are plenty of plotters, but no real plot."

23 October: Writing in the *Daily Mail*, former Conservative treasurer Lord Ashcroft rebukes the "handful of malcontents" who are trying to destabilise the party leader. Some are Portillistas, others simply IDS-haters, but "what all of them have in common is a conviction – which, having done the sums, I share – that they are not going to find 25 Conservative backbenchers prepared to write to the whips and so trigger a leadership election." In short, they are in "a minority position" and can't force IDS out. "The crucial thing is for all concerned to recognise that Iain Duncan Smith is the elected leader, and that, short of some disaster, he will remain so through the general election. The only choice facing Conservatives is whether to fight that election united under Iain Duncan Smith's banner, or to fight it divided under the same banner." No other possibility – such as a change of leader – is remotely conceivable.

25 October: Frank Johnson tells *Spectator* readers why the Tories are unlikely to ditch Iain Duncan Smith. "It is because 'everyone' says they should. In politics, 'everyone' – that is a few media people at London dinner parties – is always wrong." In the 1970s, for example, everyone underestimated Margaret Thatcher. "Now 'everyone' says Mr Duncan Smith should go, and will… This is the best sign that he might still avoid that crash."

26 October: A huge scoop for Simon Walters, political editor of the *Mail on Sunday*. "Iain Duncan Smith will quit as Tory leader rather than face a humiliating vote of no confidence," he reveals. "Despite his public insistence that he will fight on, the beleaguered Conservative leader has decided to resign 'with dignity' if rebel Tory MPs trigger a leadership ballot. 'Iain has a remarkably strong inner core, but if the choice is between being humiliated in a vote of confidence or walking away with dignity, he may opt for the latter,' said a friend." Meanwhile, in a column for the *Sunday Times*, shadow chancellor Michael Howard offers an expert assessment: "It is under the leadership of Iain Duncan Smith that we are on course to present a clear and coherent programme for government at the next election."

27 October: Tory backbencher Derek Conway admits that he has written to the chief whip demanding a confidence vote on IDS's leadership. "So is the Conservative Party finally going to be put out of its misery?" wonders Fraser Nelson, the *Scotsman*'s oracle at Westminster. "In a normal party, the answer would be an emphatic yes – but here, the IDS mutiny is a shiver looking in vain for a spine to run up. There are all too few Tory MPs like Mr Conway." Not that few, actually: the following morning, it is revealed that at least 25 Tories have indeed demanded a vote.

29 October: The day of the ballot – and the *Daily Mirror* already knows the result. "Mr Duncan Smith will do well to win the support of 30 [MPs], sending him hurtling towards political oblivion and leaving the party virtually leaderless for weeks during the contest to replace him." Michael Howard and David Davis will "slug it out for the leadership", with other possible runners including Ken Clarke, Michael Ancram and Theresa May.

Hours later, it is announced that IDS received 75 votes, and soon afterwards it becomes apparent that there will be no leadership contest. Still, he did lose the confidence vote so at least the *Mirror* was right in one respect – which is one more than most of the Westminster experts.

THE NEOPHILIACS

"Retirement is the new adolescence." — *Saga* magazine.

"Halloween is the new Christmas." — *Guardian*.

"Losing is the new winning." — Football365.com.

"Kenilworth is the new Leamington." — *Warwick Boar*.

"Are pets the new kids?" — *Red* magazine.

"If gay is the new straight, don't worry girls. Maybe bums are the new tits." — *The Australian*.

"Is a pint and a sing-song the new Prozac?" — Trailer for *Home Truths*, Radio 4.

"Scrap metal is the new irony." — *Daily Telegraph* motoring section.

South African meanwhile, have four players unable to train.

Gloucester's full-back Thinus Delport missed their session yesterday because of a thing problem,

Gloucester Citizen

IN THE TEAROOM

THERE's a situation vacant. The prime minister is now desperately seeking a new "leader-in-waiting".

Until last Thursday it was just about possible for Tony Blair to envisage – at some unspecified date, perhaps five years hence – handing over the leadership to Gordon Brown. No longer.

The chances are that Blair will only be in his mid-50s when he leaves Downing Street. And being a pretty ambitious kind of guy, he will be looking for a very big job: Holy Roman Emperor, first elected President of Europe, Great Panjandrum of a beefed-up UN, something like that. Nomination for any such post will, at least in part, be in the gift of his successor. And if that successor were a Tory, there'd be no problem. No Conservative PM would be so churlish as to refuse Britain's backing to a politician of Blair's accomplishments. But if it were Gordon Brown? After his publicly paraded pique at being once again denied a seat on Labour's national executive committee, even half a decade from now the temptation to shaft his old adversary good and proper will surely prove irresistible.

Not for the first time Blairites in the tearoom have been seriously contemplating Brown being reshuffled out of the chancellorship, maybe even downright sacked. They always use military metaphors to describe such an eventuality. "The nuclear option" used to be the cliché of choice. Now they're taking their buzz phrases from Paul Wolfowitz and talking about "draining the swamp" at No 11. Watch this space.

'Urquhart'

A NUMBER of reasons have been advanced for the astonishing spat between Tony Blair and Gordon Brown over the latter's request to join Labour's national executive committee (NEC) – not least that the chancellor would use such a position to block the return of London mayor Ken Livingstone to the Labour party, thus upsetting Tony Blair's well-laid plans.

In fact, the suggestion is merely a red herring. The real reason for the extraordinary snub to Brown was that membership of the NEC would have given him a crucial role in election planning and, more importantly, involvement in what is still quaintly known as "Clause 5", the NEC body responsible for drawing up the next manifesto.

Moves to sideline Brown began in earnest following his less than on-message address to comrades at the TUC earlier this autumn. They intensified when he went further off-message at the Labour party conference a few weeks later. Increasingly isolated in Cabinet, Brown now has ranged against him David Blunkett, Charles Clarke, John Reid and Peter Hain.

The chancellor realised that the only way of ensuring he would have a role in drawing up the manifesto was if he managed to persuade his former friend Tony Blair to award him one of the three NEC positions in the gift of the prime minister. With the retirement of John Reid and Helen Liddell from the NEC, the way had appeared open for Brown. When Brown chanced upon the Labour website a week ago and found that his former protégé Douglas Alexander had been given the position he, Brown, so coveted, the already brooding chancellor went ballistic.

Believing that Blair, whose notorious indifference to the minutiae of the party machinery would probably have agreed to his request, Brown's ire was directed towards Peter Mandelson, who has made a less than surprising return as the Dear Leader's confidant. Brown believes his old enemy Mandelson is behind the NEC blocking – and that Mandelson, whose heart is set on becoming Britain's European commissioner after the next election, is determined to prevent the increasingly Eurosceptic chancellor from having any say over party policy.

The very public supper between Blair and Brown, designed to smooth over the equally public row, has ended in a truce – for now. The idea that the increasingly vexatious Brown will be content with an ex-officio role on the NEC – attending without voting rights, and with no formal role in the election campaign – is a non-starter. Expect public hostilities to be resumed again soon.

"The big, bad wolf huffed, and he puffed, but he still couldn't bring the house down"

DAVID LOCK, a former junior minister at the lord chancellor's department, famously lost his Kidderminster seat at the last election to independent local hospital campaigner Richard Taylor.

Lock's defeat came in the teeth of local opposition to his slavish support for government policies – most notably that which led to the planned closure of Kidderminster hospital. Now Lock is busy telling friends his reward for selflessly falling on his sword is to be made a peer by Tony Blair in the new year honours' list. But surely any decision as to whether Lock should be sent to the Lords is still a matter for Her Majesty?

ADAIR TURNER, Labour' pensions "czar", told the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) last month that "final salary" pension schemes will die out and private sector employees will have to put up with riskier pensions that go up and down with the stock market.

While chairing Labour's pension commission, Turner is also vice-chair of the investment bank Merrill Lynch, and so has a close interest in seeing pensions having to rely on stock market gambling.

His other big idea – forcing knackered employees to work until they drop, or reach 70 – would also delight some in the City. But the department for work and pensions (DWP) told the *Eye* that as yet these are Turner's personal views, rather than official policy.

Do Turner's own personal pension arrangements have any influence on his policy statements? While his salary at Merrill Lynch is undoubtedly vast, it is not on public record. The DWP did promise to ask about Turner's own pension arrangements but had not responded at the time of going to press.

Turner's pension commission is not due to report until next June. But he is already able to help the government with a current dilemma. Chancellor Gordon Brown wants to levy a 60 percent tax on directors' pension funds worth more than £1.4m. Appalled at this attack on their riches, company directors have been lobbying Tony Blair, who is insisting the executives be allowed to have at least £1.8m tax free in the kitty along with other tax breaks.

So while the government has sat on its hands as "final salary" schemes for thousands of ordinary workers are closed down, they are rowing furiously about the multimillion-pound pensions of a few company directors. And their chief pensions adviser is, inevitably, a very rich company director indeed.

WITH a spot of shameless number crunching, the *Eye*'s favourite computer company, Electronic Data Systems (EDS), is blowing its trumpet over full-page advertisements in various public sector journals.

It's been busy boasting of 4,000 pension queries processed each month; 6,000 PCs set up in the court service; 324,710 tax returns received by internet; and, scraping the barrel, "74,000 prisoners kept safe and secure".

By way of contrast for readers, here are some other figures EDS could have trumpeted over the past few years: 112,000 income support claimants receiving double their entitlement due to an EDS error, costing the taxpayer £10.5m; £1.18m council rent arrears in Kingston and 1,400 tenants being wrongly accused of benefit fraud before EDS's contract was terminated.

This year, three months into the disastrous new tax credits scheme running on EDS systems, 400,000 claims were paid late, with another 220,000 still not processed. Indeed, so serious is the chaos that the treasury select committee recently insisted that the government and taxpayers should be properly compensated by EDS.

While the government pretends it will seek such compensation, it may find confrontation with EDS rather awkward. When Liberal Democrat spokesman Vincent Cable recently asked how much money had been paid in the last five years by the Inland Revenue to EDS, the answer was astonishing: 1998-99, £208.4m; 1999-2000, £252.3m; 2000-2001, £247m; 2001-2002, £299.1m; 2002-2003, £331.9m.

And now that the treasury plans to coordinate all Revenue computer services, can you guess the names of the companies that are favourite to win this vast prize? Er… EDS in alliance with Accenture, who together provide pretty well all the services already.

FRIENDS of Lord (George) Robertson, jovial former defence secretary and champion of "new" Labour, must have been worried by the news that he was leaving his top job at NATO.

How would he manage to keep himself in the style to which he had become accustomed? His friends need not have worried. Almost every week comes news of a new job for George in which his experience of military matters will stand him in good stead.

Not only is he to be deputy chairman of Cable and Wireless, and a director of Keir Engineering. His most recent appointment is as part-time adviser to the European branch of the Royal Bank of Canada, where he will supervise military private finance initiative contracts. The salary is undisclosed.

In the 1960s, Sandra Howard, then a model, was one of the loveliest girls in England. Today, she still does some modelling, and retains all her beauty. She is also an extremely intelligent woman, and a quietly forceful one.

BRUCE ANDERSON
Independent

Submitted by Philip Conford

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

The Future Of Politics

Right...

WHILE acrimony is rife in Conservative Future, the party's youf wing (see *Eye* 1091), the latest issue of *Heartland*, the monthly magazine for party members, offers handy tips on how to recruit the young 'uns.

In "Engaging the 20 & 30 somethings", Merton councillor Matt Bird provides an invaluable guide for Tory associations on what excites the young shavers:

Young people are "disillusioned with politics" so the association must "not present itself as a caricature of a typical local political group"! What to do? "Single issues" have more appeal than politics, apparently.

Young people "are sometimes accused by their elders of having a short attention span. Whether that's true or not, the kind of events they like are fast-moving, with a strong sense of focus. If you expose them to a traditional local association meeting, you'll never see them again."

The young, it appears, "work longer hours than previous generations" and "their spare time is spent hanging out with friends or going to the gym." But, prepare yourselves, "they still need to eat". So "find someone on the association with a flair for hospitality, and set them loose"!

"The twenties and thirties generation are electronically wired." It is therefore "critical to maximise the use of electronic communications". You need to "seek out an association member who is computer literate".

Unfortunately this go-getting message is rather undermined by some of the products advertised in the magazine. These include pensioners' hearing aids, branded "comfort stretch" trousers, reproduction antique gramophones, medical insurance for the over-50s, retirement homes on the south coast, leg "relaxa-stool" supporters, back-care chairs, retirement investment advice, and an "easy-bather" bath aid.

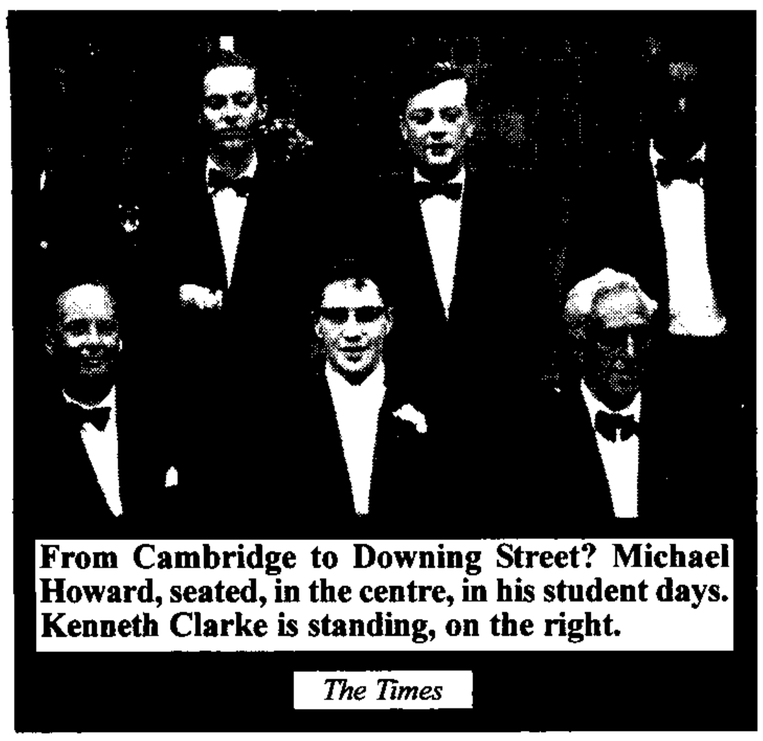
...and left

THE Socialist Alliance, a coalition of Sparts, has decided to raise its profile and improve its image. To this end its website recently published advice to activists on how to use the media.

"TV and radio appearances are not difficult to get," it noted, but certain rules must be followed. "Brush your hair and wear a clean shirt… Know what your [*sic*] talking about… Do not get shirty." Oh, and try to display a bit of charm and humour. "Even if you are locked in debate with Ann Widdecombe try not to come across as a hate-filled dogmatist – no matter how much that might reflect your real personality."

There was then some specific advice for local press officers. "A press officer needs to be level-headed, literate, informed, motivated and have the ability to lay on a touch of schmooze. A press officer cannot be (a) a maverick that represents themselves more than the branch, (b) quick to anger and potentially destroy precious relationships with the press, (c) drunk, stoned or otherwise unsuitable to be the public face of the local SA."

Sadly it seems Socialist Alliance supporters didn't care for these implicit slurs on their character, personal hygiene and drinking habits. The entire document has now been erased from the website.



From Cambridge to Downing Street? Michael Howard, seated, in the centre, in his student days. Kenneth Clarke is standing, on the right.

The Times

CONCERNED by the increasing delays in getting answers to written parliamentary questions, MPs sought to put defence ministers on the spot by demanding to know the average time between question and answer.

Junior defence minister Ivor Caplin helpfully replied that it would cost too much to find out. But his belated answer – on 20 October – suggested the delay can last many months. (The original question was tabled on 12 June.)

IRASCIBLE *Daily Mail* pundit Simon Heffer is very angry indeed with the plotters who brought down his mate IDS.

"The people responsible for this turn of events – a few MPs, and various hangers-on in the party machine – exhibit a mental age of about nine. Most of us grew out of student union intriguing when we left university."

Hefferlump should know: as a Cambridge undergraduate in the early 1980s his intrigues and misdemeanours in student politics were legendary. Many contemporaries still recall the canvassing technique he used when running for office in the Conservative association – which was to promise that, if elected, "I'll even introduce you to my young lady, if you're very lucky. You can have the privilege of meeting her and then you can ogle and go gosh… You can have a spontaneous orgasm when I win."

Alas, one elector secretly recorded this enticing sales pitch. It was splashed over the front page of the student rag, which commented that Heffer's career prospects now looked "far from promising". He was then expelled from the Conservative association.

'Backbiter'

May I say to the House that it is good to see the Prime Minister here on top form, fighting inequality as usual?

JOAN WALLEY MP

Submitted by James Carragher

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

GM SPECIAL

GREAT is the puzzlement in agriculture at the outcome of the farm scale evaluation (FSE) of the three GM crop species, rape, sugar beet and maize. Not at the technical results, which were entirely predictable (so weedkillers kill weeds: what a surprise!) The amazement is that anyone thinks this matters.

As a group, British arable farmers are possibly the most efficient body of trained killers on the planet. These soldiers of the sprayer have spent 50 years utterly dedicated to their task of killing every living thing that grows, crawls or flies across their land, and no one has taken any notice at all.

Then one day someone turns up with a way of killing weeds even more efficiently with herbicide-tolerant crops on which "total" herbicide can be used – Farmer Giles's very own weapon of mass destruction. And it works! And then what happens? Folks start saying: "Hang on a minute! These GM crops damage the environment. We mustn't allow that."

Where has everyone been for the last few decades? The very herbicide which produced "unacceptable" effects when used on GM crops is used daily by farmers for killing all weeds on stubbles and set-aside. No such farm scale evaluation has *ever* been made of any other crop, or farming system or pesticide. The very variation in wildlife between different crops and systems in conventional farming is far greater than the difference between those and GM crops. If the environment in arable crop land actually mattered to anyone, the time for this debate was when herbcides were first developed. If it doesn't matter – and a glance out of a train window anywhere in England shows that it doesn't – why has it arisen now?

Hence the pro-GM lobby's bafflement and frustration that the crops are being condemned simply for doing what they were designed to do. This is a shame because it has diverted attention from the real reasons GM crops should not be allowed. They are grossly unpredictable and hence unsafe; and, above all, they cannot be isolated from conventional and organic crops.

The government and GM lobby pussyfooted around the issue of separation with endless waffle about "protocols". GM crops cannot be kept isolated and will soon be in every crop in the country, a fact acknowledged by the GM industry long ago. Tests on farm-saved seed show that 8 percent of samples have more than 10 percent of the wrong variety. So even if a 1 percent limit on contamination by GM was acceptable (which it isn't), it is, as everyone in the industry knows, unattainable.

'Gumboot'

HIGH PRINCIPALS

THE pay freeze at Park Lane College, Leeds (see *Eye* 1074), hasn't saved nearly enough cash and the college has just announced plans to make 70 staff redundant after revealing to trade union reps that it has racked up a £2m deficit – despite an increase in students this year.

The move will tear apart a teaching team which last year achieved the highest further education Ofsted score in the country with the vast majority of lecturers rated either "good" or "outstanding". Principal Tony Longworth said the college had been badly hit by the change in funding formula applying to part-time adults. The college actually exceeded its target of 35,000 students, but not enough of them joined the courses which attract high levels of funding.

However, Natfhe union rep Iain Owens blamed the cash shortfall on "management incompetence" noting: "Park Lane has done nothing until a crisis has hit them in the face." Staff also wonder what became of college reserves which are now down to a mere £800,000.

EYE TV

Brookside (Channel 4)

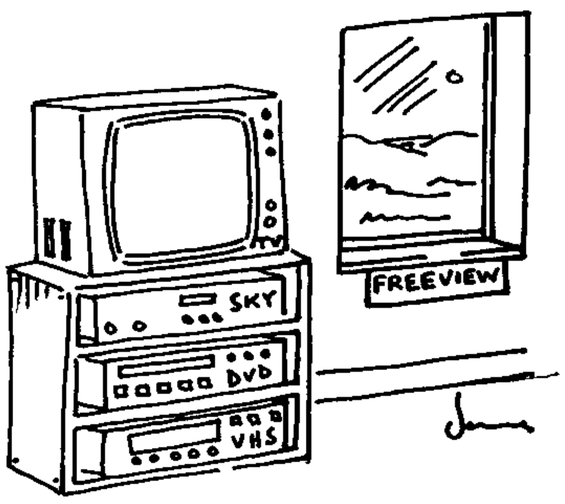
A THEATRE production which had run for 20 years would end with the producers being carried around a champagne party on the shoulders of the backers. But a television soap opera is designed to run for ever and therefore departure after even two decades feels like bitter failure.

So **Brookside** was dragged screaming away last week, filled with a series of bitter in-jokes about the circumstances of its axeing. Drug-dealer Jack Michaelson – his name a sarcastic anagram of Michael Jackson, the first Channel 4 boss to threaten *Brookside*'s future – was hanged by an angry mob, while Jimmy Corkhill, a character who has shown virtually no interest in cultural matters in the thousands of episodes in which he had appeared, was given a moving monologue about the decline of British standards, including the view that television had ceased to care about what viewers really wanted.

Yet those moments, which were supposed to make the case for *Brookie*'s continuation, actually argued for its execution. The lurid killing of Michaelson – merely the latest horribly violent act in a supposedly upwardly mobile Merseyside Close which had now seen frequent murders, sieges, flesh-eating killer bugs, incest and drug-running – was a perfect example of how the show had become driven by sensational plot-twist rather than social realism or journalistic campaigning.

In the same way, Corkhill's Jimmy Porteresque rant illustrated the way that the show had increasingly found it necessary to sacrifice coherent characterisation for day-by-day personalities in which the protagonists took on whatever values were necessary to make sense of a particular script.

Finally, the fact that both the Michaelson name and the Corkhill world-view turned in on themselves and reflected the show's own battles stood for a self-indulgence which had come to take over the production. A worryingly ridiculous conclusion – in which Jimmy Corkhill was persuaded to go and live in the big country house now owned by old Close bad lad Barry Grant – only really makes sense as another two-fingers from the show to television. Phil Redmond, the series' creator, who was once a penniless Scouser, now owns vast leafy properties as a result of his success in television, as this final plot-twist seemed to be



reminding salaried executives.

Yet the final episode also contained reminders of what was lost. Elegant touches – such as Corkhill painting a D on the famous street-sign to make it "Brookside Closed" – had a visual awareness which represented Redmond's work at its best.

And, although the actual gibes are childish, Redmond has some justification in blaming telly bosses for what happened in *Brookside*. What had started as the first socially realistic soap – in storylines such as Bobby Grant's dilemmas over striking and Sheila Grant's rape – became sensational after Channel 4 (under Michael Grade) demanded ever more episodes, which were under increasing pressure to deliver ratings. This had the eventual effect of losing viewers.

But what did for *Brookie* in the end was a significant change – under Michael Jackson and then Mark Thompson – in the way C4 operated. A channel which had initially been perceived as a club or brand which needed loyal viewers – kept there by regular franchises like *Brookside* – was gradually switched to a channel which would offer big and spasmodic events bringing in viewers who might stay for one show only: *Big Brother*, *Wife Swap*, cricket, *Shackleton*. A channel run on the theory of school dinners changed to Christmas dinners and there was no room for a three times a week plate of Scouse.

Redmond is now planning to experiment with releasing new feature-length episodes of *Brookside* on DVD. He did something similar in the past with spin-off videos of sequences – including Lindsay Corkhill's wedding day – too violent or steamy for TV.

Redmond has always been ahead of the game in TV and it's likely that viewing in the distant future will contain some version of self-scheduling TV sold to the individual. But soap opera was habit-viewing and DVDs are a luxury purpose and it's hard to see how these two markets can be brought together. The *Brookie* DVD initiative seems likely to go the way of all those newspaper marketing directors who calculated that, if just 10 percent of the readership bought the spin-off book, they would all be millionaires. The conversion rate of inertia consumption into active buying is much lower.

Even so, there are few television series which changed the medium and *Brookside* is one of them. Without it, *EastEnders* and *Hollyoaks* would almost certainly not now exist and *Coronation Street* would be even more of a social antique than it currently is. Redmond was a genuine pioneer.

But, while Christopher Columbus can't really be blamed for the way America turned out, Redmond was still around when his new territory was wrecked. *Brookside* will be taught in media schools as an example of how novelty can become repetition and then ridiculousness.

'Remote Controller'

DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: In ancient mythology, how many labours did Hercules do?

Contestant: One.

Robinson: When a cricket player is said to have scored a century, how many runs has he scored?

Contestant: Two.

Robinson: Hadrian's Wall was built to keep out which tribe, the Picts or the Zulus?

Contestant: The Zulus.

Robinson: Can you complete the title of the book by Jerome K. Jerome, "Three Men In A..."?

Contestant: Baby.

MEDIA NEWS

BUDGETS are being tightened at BBC News and Current Affairs radio where savings of at least 10% are being demanded and redundancies are forecast.

A novel scheme whereby staff whose programmes are being axed can buy extra holiday time, thus easing pressure on salary costs, has been introduced. Producers have also been told to focus on cheaper domestic stories and all but essential foreign travel has been halted.

Meanwhile, RAJAR ratings reveal that the BBC's range of digital radio stations, 1Xtra, BBC7, 6Music and Radio Five Live Extra are reaching an audience of virtually nobody – well, around 500,000 anyway. So far they have cost licence-payers £27m. Now, a further £300m has been set aside for digital radio and television over the next two years.

BBC bosses claim the new radio stations are aimed at "under-served audiences" and people who have been "marginalised" by the BBC and listen instead to commercial radio stations – the very same people who might be better served by properly funded news and current affairs on radios 1 to 5, perhaps.

PS: Seventeen BBC executives have received bonuses totalling £895,000. Last year 19 managers received bonuses worth £798,000. The total payout for BBC executives rose from just over £4m in 2001 for just 18 managers, to £5m this year, for 20 managers.

THE SMALL PRINT

AN occasional column for advertising claims with ludicrous rubric...

"CATCH THE NEXT TRAIN OUT"

(Virgin trains, national press and poster campaign)

"Fares shown must be bought at least 14 days in advance."

100 Best Excuses...
Kev Pyne
FOR THESE 100 BEST PROGRAMMES...
1. CHEAP.
2. EASY.
3. LAZY.
4. CHANCE FOR D LIST CELEBRITIES TO GET ON TV.
5. FILLS UP THE WEEKEND SCHEDULES.
6. SHOW REPEATS AND SAY THEY'RE NEW PROGRAMMES.
7. DON'T HAVE TO THINK UP NEW TITLES.
8. FILLS IN BETWEEN THE PORN.
9. REQUIRES NO IMAGINATION.
10. GET THE VIEWERS TO DO ALL THE WORK BY VOTING
Another 90 excuses after the break!

AD NAUSEAM

NIKE, which makes the England rugby team's skin-tight kit which has been so conspicuously torn to shreds in the world cup matches in Australia, now finds itself in advertising's equivalent of the sin bin.

The sportswear manufacturer had filmed a lavish 90-second advert in which the likes of Lawrence Dallaglio, Dan Luger and James Simpson-Daniel join a host of other rugby stars on Nike's payroll from the various competing nations.

Sadly for Nike, we're unlikely ever to see the ad. It features the big boys playing rugby in the streets of London, crashing through windows, rucking parked cars and jumping in front of busses and has fallen foul of Broadcasting Advertising Clearance Centre (BACC) rules.

Ball games on High Holborn in rush hour aren't to be encouraged, so it won't be shown in the UK.

Meanwhile actress Minnie Driver, apparently suffering a severe attack of social conscience, has skipped Hollywood to go and work in a Phnom Penh clothing factory. She told showbiz reporters she plans to make a documentary "or at least write a book" about her experiences in Cambodia. "Western companies should be paying a lot more to the workers in these sweatshops for the jobs they do. The inequality is shocking," she said.

But has Driver told her tennis star boyfriend Robby Ginepri this? He has a megabucks sponsorship deal with Nike. And despite Nike's claims that it is improving conditions at its 700 factories worldwide, Oxfam-run Nikewatch say: "Independent research continues to indicate that workers in Nike contract factories are still commonly required to work more than 60 hours per week and are harassed or threatened with dismissal if they refuse overtime. They are still paid wages which are below what they need to feed their children and are still intimidated and threatened with violence when they try to form unions."

The boundaries between sponsorship and advertising have been further blurred at the BBC, meanwhile, which is supposed to have a no-advertising rule. *Born to Win*, which pitted young sporting hopefuls against one another for the chance to win a "BBC bursary for life", has been giving Norwich Union (NU) an astonishing amount of prime-time brand exposure.

Host Dermot Leary could barely utter a sentence without reminding viewers the programme was "supported by Norwich Union" or that it was a "Norwich Union-sponsored event". NU corporate branding was displayed all over the centrepiece competitions.

According to a press release announcing the venture, it was a joint effort between BBC Specialist Factual and BBC Sport, and so should have been free of commercial obligations. But as the same press release said: "The *Born to Win* event is sponsored by Norwich Union. Norwich Union is one of the UK's leading sports sponsors". The only point not mentioned was how much money changed hands.

THAT notorious pessimist Martin "Shorty" Sorrell, head of the WPP group, has been moaning about the state of the advertising market for several years now. Usually his grim gurglings involve talk of "bath-shaped recessions" and other such management hokum. And usually they're wrong.

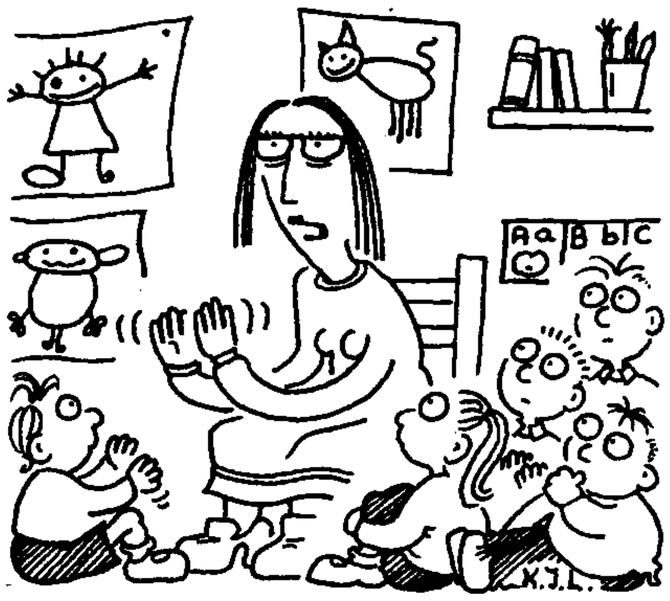
His most recent pronouncement came at the unveiling of WPP's interim results, when he tempered some heartening news about slight company growth with a warning that "plans, budgets and forecasts of revenue will continue to be made on a conservative basis and considerable attention is still being focused on achieving margin and staff cost to revenue." In other words, no trebles all round this year boys.

Unless your name's Shorty. It emerged a week later that despite his appeal for prudence, Sorrell trousered £2.3m in 2003, an increase of 51 percent on his 2002 package in a year when his company revenue grew 2 percent.

Warballs

"It's what makes America great. We have our young men and women around the world fighting to protect freedom and tragically dying, and this is a way in some sense to say, 'This is what we're fighting for'." — Comment by Mayor Bloomberg on, er, the New York marathon.

"The prevalence of this virus certainly does not mean that cruise travel is unsafe because, in fact, 'less than 1 per cent of worldwide cruise passengers have been involved to date'. Indeed, one reason such sick-bug stories are becoming more common is that now, more than ever (possibly because of 11 September), we all love a good cruise." — *Guardian*.



"If you're employing happy, healthy lifestyle strategies, and you know it, clap your hands..."

OUT OF CON-TEXT

"HUPPERT is typically superb" read the quotes on posters for *Le Temps du Loup*, attributing the quote to no less a personage than Sukdhev Sandhu, the *Daily Telegraph*'s erudite film editor.

Sandhu did indeed write that phrase in a piece filed from Cannes in May – but he also noted that the film was so "unlovable" that half the audience walked out, several members booed, and "myself, I felt rather appalled".

BIRTSPEAK

HUMAN resources managers at the BBC, keen to boost morale in the beleaguered online department, mailed out a questionnaire recently proving, if nothing else, that the spirit of the chief Dalek lives on.

One sample statement ran: "Within BBCi, Senior Managers devote a LARGE amount of personal energy, time, and focused attention to build and maintain implementation of common world class core processes which align the business actions and perspectives with the key tasks it needs to perform well and which ensures that those tasks are performed efficiently, effectively and in a consistent fashion ('we strive for consistency whereever possible, we actively avoid reinventing the wheel.')"

Participants were asked to grade this on a scale "from 1 (Agree) to 5 (Disagree)." The option "0 (Understand)" was not given.

Number crunching

£1m

■ amount Catherine Zeta-Jones claimed was "not that much" to her and her husband during wedding photos trial

£600,000

■ amount they claimed in damages

£14,600

■ amount they were awarded

NATIONAL 'TRUST'

WITH a crunch vote looming over its unusual decision to develop housing on land entrusted to its safe-keeping, the National Trust could do without further evidence that the scheme is unnecessary. But here is some anyway.

The National Trust's plans to allow Countryside Properties to build nearly 200 new "high-density eco-friendly" homes on the Cliveden estate in Berkshire were first revealed in *Eye* 1079. The area to be built on is a small patch of brownfield land, resulting from the closure of a temporary Second World War hospital in the 1980s, in the middle of the greenbelt.

Villagers from nearby Taplow, who oppose the development, have always said they had no objection to a previous scheme for a 135-unit retirement complex which has had planning permission for several years. A retirement community would generate less peak time traffic on the narrow country lanes.

The trust, however, has consistently argued that the retirement development was not commercially viable. So a letter from Beechcroft Developers to Taplow parish councillors is *very* revealing. Beechcroft has told the parish council that three years ago it offered an eight-figure sum to the trust for the opportunity to develop the retirement complex.

Says Beechcroft managing director Christopher Thompson, "Our proposal would have enabled the trust to proceed with the much needed restoration work three years ago, rather than allow Cliveden to fall into further disrepair."

The National Trust's annual general meeting is on 15 November. Taplow residents who are also trust members have proposed a motion condemning the scheme. With most of the trust's membership, all of whom are eligible to vote, being people who joined out of a wish to protect historic landscapes, the whole scheme could be about to screech to a halt.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

TOM FORD IS LEAVING GUCCI :
TOM, YOU'RE THE MAN WHO MADE STELLA McCARTNEY AND ALEXANDER McQUEEN SO BIG!!!
FASHION TRIPE
I KNOW.....
I'M SO SORRY!!!
IT'S ALL MY FAULT!!!
Don't worry - I won't tell anyone!!!
SOB!

DOING THE ROUNDS

Anger management

A RECENT BMA survey that found that one in three doctors have suffered violent behaviour from patients or relatives in the last year has had some interesting responses.

As one casualty registrar put it: "Is it really only one in three? I've just finished a weekend of nights – physically attacked once, verbally abused six times, mouthfuls of blood spat at myself and nursing colleagues by one charmer and threatened by a gang of 15 bikers who tried to tear down security screens."

So what to do about it? The government's "zero tolerance" plan (which involves putting up lots of posters with "zero tolerance" on them) seems to have failed lamentably and staff are having to take action. As another casualty doctor advises: "I've been sworn at, punched, kicked, strangled, threatened with a knife, threatened with being shot (over the phone), had a cigarette stubbed out on my arm, been spat at and attacked with a chair. You have several options while confronted by this:

"The 'Beirut' approach: I spent two months with Glasgow ambulance paramedics as part of my elective. I was in the back of an ambulance with a paramedic travelling down a 40mph road in Coatbridge when the patient grabbed my collar and started shouting at me. The vehicle screeched to a halt, the back doors flew open and the paramedics threw the patient out of the vehicle on to the road. They then told him if he wanted back in he had to behave himself. Shaken, and meek as a lamb, he climbed back in. Glasgow crews refer to Coatbridge as 'Beirut' for this reason.

"The 'Only I get to swear in here' approach. 'Shut the fuck up or I'll have you arrested and removed.' Make sure you have an open escape route in case the patient decides to attack you.

"The 'Retreat and get the fuzz' approach: retreat, call the police, and return with them as an escort or outside the curtains. Tell the patient that in view of the threat to your safety you will only treat them with the police present.

"The 'Press charges' approach: I got £100 from a punter on top of his £1,000 fine after he took a chair and chased me round an A&E.

"Once you are happy the patient's life is not in immediate danger, refuse to treat them until they behave. Always make an official report, preferably a police one as well. Document why you were unable to treat the patient properly. And as for aggressive or violent relatives – first sign of trouble and I have them all removed (by the police if necessary)."

Private loss

"IF the government get this right, it could be the death of private practice." So confided a senior BUPA source over "new" Labour's plans to franchise out substantial amounts of lucrative NHS surgery to private hospitals and treatment centres. The price per head is significantly more than the NHS, but significantly less than the usual private fee. So why pay to go private when you can do it on the NHS for free?

While this approach will doubtless reduce waiting lists for hips, hernias and cataracts, and make nice headlines in time for the next election, it means substantial numbers of existing NHS staff will be recruited to work in the new private centres, leaving the critically and chronically sick to fend for themselves in the NHS. The NHS can never fairly compete with the private sector because it has to treat sick and angry people too. Maybe busloads of wandering octogenarians and pissed bikers should be ferried round to private hospitals to level the playing field.

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY

OH DEAR, THAT WAS THE FINAL TEST.
IT SEEMS THERE'S SOMETHING VERY WRONG WITH YOUR REFLEXES...
YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO GO 'BLOODY HELL' WHEN I TOLD YOU YOUR NEXT APPOINTMENT'S IN SEVEN MONTHS

SIGNAL FAILURES

What passengers want

STAGECOACH, the transport empire founded by evangelist Brian Souter, perceives a threat to its Thatcherite bedrock and is preaching how public money should be spent.

Transport authorities in big provincial cities want powers to get tough with bus operators (which cream off profits of up to 25 percent) and have set up a support unit which is lobbying for re-regulation. Stagecoach responded: "Why is money being spent on expensive spin-doctoring and not on what passengers want?"

Stagecoach forgot to make a similar comment in September, however, when the strategic rail authority (SRA) paid for posters at 106 stations on Stagecoach's South West Trains claiming "4 out of 5 trains are on time". SWT's punctuality record is significantly worse (71 percent peak-time punctuality in 2002-03); but the SRA spin doctors used a nationwide average to tell SWT customers that things are better than they seem.

Souter needn't lose any sleep over his £800,000 pay, however. "New" Labour has avoided re-regulating buses, despite its pledges in opposition. Since the 1997 election bus use has declined 6 percent outside London and grown 15 percent in London (where buses *are* regulated). Stagecoach owes its existence to Thatcher's bus deregulation, which allowed it to force smaller rivals off the road unfairly.

"Deplorable, predatory and against the public interest," said the monopolies commission after Stagecoach crushed one council-owned bus firm. In fact, having muscled in, Stagecoach doesn't always deliver "what passengers want". Bus users in Devon are furious with Stagecoach's strategy of cutting and cancelling services and raising fares.

Stagecoach owns half of Virgin Trains and has yet to comment on the morality of huge bailouts (*Eyes passim*) for the franchises Virgin won by promising to pay over £1bn into public coffers. And presumably SWT's sudden 350 percent subsidy increase (*Eye* 1089) is a reasonable use of public money too.

NETWORK RAIL expects to save up to £300m a year by doing maintenance work itself (see last *Eye*). That figure probably excludes the cost of accidents which would have resulted from the incompetence, confusion and buck-passing inherent in using maintenance contractors. Multiply £300m by the 9.5 years contractors have been in use, and you get a clue why subsidy has almost trebled since privatisation.

NR took the initiative on maintenance contractors without external pressure. But, with so much cash being squandered and so many accidents arising, why wasn't this change demanded by the government, the national audit office, the transport department, the rail regulator, the SRA or the health and safety executive? More millions could be saved overnight by sacking the bureaucrats who didn't notice this elephant on their doorstep.

PS: NR's decision to continue with track-renewal contracts points to another own goal by Railtrack, which wanted to stimulate competition for contracts. Instead of investing in track machines itself and leasing them to contractors, Railtrack told companies like Jarvis to buy new kit (to augment the British Rail machines practically given away to the contractors at privatisation). That put a handful of contractors in such a strong position nobody else could enter the market. Even after being kicked out of maintenance, the equipment-owning renewal contractors have NR by the balls.

DOES the private sector actually put money into the railways? The answer depends on the policy "new" Labour is trying to justify.

Last month transport secretary Alistair Darling was asked on *Today* why London Underground was starting to use private maintenance contractors while Network Rail was taking its contracts back in house. He replied: "We're spending £73m a week of public money. It's bringing in a similar amount from the private sector. To get rid of that would be mad."

Last summer the strategic rail authority insisted that the private sector was making no contribution at all. But that was when the government wanted to justify yet more fare increases. "There are only two sources of funds for the railway – fares or freight user charges, and subsidy," said the SRA's fares review in June.

'Dr B. Ching'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

OH HAPPY DAI

ATTEMPTS to draw a veil over the scandals at Flintshire county council (the *Eye*'s "Council to watch in 2003") appear to have failed.

With chief executive Philip McGreevy and sidekick Andrew Loveridge under police investigation on a number of issues (*Eyes passim*), the Labour council's leader, Alex "Dodgy Boiler" Aldridge, found a novel way to "discipline" the two.

In the past five years more than 200 Flintshire council staff have been suspended while under investigation – the high figure being a combination of the number of scandals and the council's aggressive attitude to whistleblowers (neighbouring Wrexham, a larger council, on average suspends 10 employees a year). But rather than suspend the top two while investigations by police and auditors were underway, a panel of councillors was appointed by Aldridge to decide their fate. The seven-man panel chewed the fat for three days in a luxury hotel before deciding there was no need to discipline either officer. The result was hardly surprising: the panel consisted of four members of the ruling Labour group as well as a former council leader with long-standing links with McGreedy, plus two opposition members.

The panel predictably split 5-2, with only the opposition members voting for action – perhaps as JPs they had a better understanding of what constitutes criminality than the other five. The result doesn't seem to have calmed Loveridge's nerves. He succumbed to the "Flintshire disease" last week and has been signed off sick for a month. McGreevy isn't out of the woods yet – he faces a chat with Insp Dai Knacker, who at last seems to be pulling his finger out, later this month.

● **FLINTSHIRE, alas, isn't the only place where voicing a principled objection to public "servants"' behaviour can put your job at risk. Kevin Morby, a fireman and independent councillor in Middlesbrough, was suspended last month from his job by Cleveland fire authority after publicly criticising allowances awarded to the authority's members by themselves. Ordinary members will now get £1,000 a year, executive members £3,000 and the chair £5,000 – not bad for attending one meeting a month. An independent remuneration panel had suggested £600 for ordinary members and £1,500 for the executive. Morby hasn't officially been told why he was suspended and the authority will only say it was "under fire service disciplinary regulations". He has been allowed back to work but the threat of disciplinary hearings remains.**

CAR WARS

IN THE bad old days Doncaster's politicians took gifts and entertainment on the quiet from businessmen looking for favours. Under "new" Labour, they now do it openly.

Donny mayor Martin Winter has taken delivery of a new £25,800 luxury Mercedes C220 CDI Elegance saloon in a sponsorship deal between the council and a local car dealership, Dixon Motors. In return for its generosity, which saves the council the £4,500-a-year it used to spend on a leased Toyota, Dixon has been promised a range of benefits including having the company name emblazoned all over the mayor's car, plus favourable articles in council newsletters.

Meanwhile down the road in Lincolnshire, local Tories are more blatant about the necessity for council fat cats to ride around in swanky cars at the taxpayer's expense. County council chairman Peter Bray has turned up his nose at a top-of-the-range Rover 75 in which to travel to his official duties. Instead he has chosen a John Prescott-style silver Jaguar XJ6. The Rover would have cost £29,500 to lease for five years; the Jag is costing £54,000. The council insists the Jag reflects the "dignity of the office" and has "more legroom". Alas, as the excellent *Lincolnshire Echo* points out, no mere automobile, however grand, could ever provide enough headroom for a councillor of Mr Bray's ilk.

LAGER AND LIMESTONE

BATH'S councillors have decided that something must be done about the problem of late-night revellers who relieve themselves against the walls of the city's elegant Georgian terraces, the soft limestone of which is dissolving in the flood of urine.

A committee report on late-night drinking for the Lib-Dem dominated council suggests that publicans and nightclub owners should ask customers "if they've been yet" before they stagger into the night. Licensees have rightly ridiculed the idea as impractical. They say more public lavatories might help. The geniuses on the council recently revealed plans to *close* 16 of the city's 37 public loos (*Eye* 1091).

FUNNY MONEY

MORE financial wonders at Hammersmith & Fulham. The council, already embarrassed by a £179m black hole in its pension fund (*Eyes passim*), has been forced to admit that three-quarters of the "surplus" in its general account does not actually exist.

The £12.5m balance has been inflated by a mysterious £9m "non-cash item". The council blithely says that the imaginary windfall – "which is not backed by actual cash in the bank" – turned up when it discovered thousands of book-keeping errors dating back to 1992. This means that the borough was mis-stating its accounts for as long as Enron, the Texan energy company brought down by financial scandals in 2001.

Hammersmith & Fulham has plenty of previous in this. It was forced to sack senior staff in the direct services workforce just last April, after the discovery of £3.4m cost over-runs and no fewer than 70,000 book-keeping "errors". Where the money went is anybody's guess. Enron-on-Thames itself blames "incorrect accounting policies, poor internal controls and outdated charging mechanisms", as if this answers the question. And it warns of further losses to come.

As for the latest £9m "non-cash item", the council warns there will be extra costs to make good the mistakes. It says they may be as high as £11m. So a "non-cash" profit is actually hiding a potential cash loss. Happily for council leader Andrew Slaughter and his "new" Labour team these costs are not scheduled to come due until 2007… just after the next council election.

BATTLE OF THE ALMO

WHEN Leeds city council transferred its crumbling housing stock to so-called "arm's length management organisations" (almos) last year, it sold the controversial idea on the grounds that almos would attract extra government funding to tackle urgent repairs. Tenants up and down the land had been assured by deputy prime minister John "Four Homes" Prescott that opting for almos would increase resources for rundown housing estates.

Opponents said such claims seemed too good to be true – and they were right. The audit commission has just given four of Leeds's six almos a miserable one-star rating for their performance so far, with only two achieving the magic two stars necessary to unlock new funds. So most of the city's long-suffering tenants will lose out on almost £200m that had been promised for housing improvements. Red faces all round at the council – and for Colin Challen, Labour MP for Morley and Rothwell, an erstwhile champion of almos who admitted in the Commons last month that Leeds tenants had been "cheated" by his government.

EDUCASHUN NEWZ

CAMPAIGNERS who fought successfully to save a highly praised centre for blind and visually impaired children were astonished to discover that the private firm running the state school had prepared the ground for the outright privatisation of the school – by effectively selling it to itself.

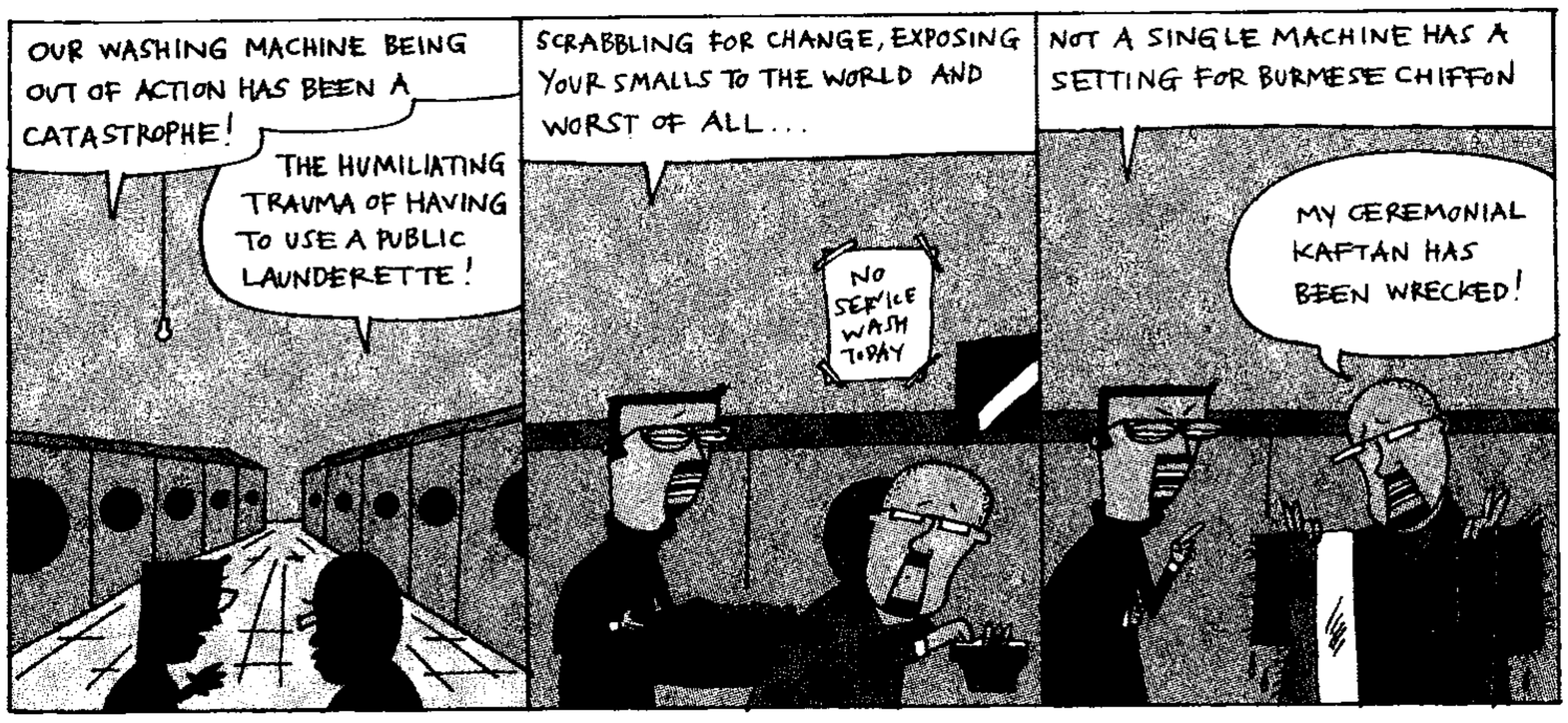
EduAction, the private contractor running schools for the London borough of Waltham Forest (LBWF), had planned to close Joseph Clarke school as part of its reorganisation of special schooling. But a hard-fought battle by pupils, staff and parents saved the school, which takes in 80 percent of its students from other boroughs across north London and Essex (see last *Eye*). The other LEAs pay LBWF for taking on the extra pupils.

A report to the council's cabinet in September listed various things the company had explored in deciding on options for the special school's future. It read: "Discussion with Nord Anglia, which operates a number of independent schools in the UK and overseas, also indicated that it was interested in looking at operating the school as an independent school should that be the option that the LEA wanted to give serious consideration to."

The report makes no mention of the fact that Nord Anglia is EduAction's parent company. If it had bought Joseph Clarke School and entirely removed it from the state sector, Nord Anglia would have been able to charge the education authorities considerably more than LBWF was charging for taking on their blind and visually impaired pupils, just as other independent special schools currently do. The LEAs would have been a captive market, especially if they did not want to interrupt the children's schooling.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER


OUR WASHING MACHINE BEING OUT OF ACTION HAS BEEN A CATASTROPHE!
THE HUMILIATING TRAUMA OF HAVING TO USE A PUBLIC LAUNDERETTE!
SCRABBLING FOR CHANGE, EXPOSING YOUR SMALLS TO THE WORLD AND WORST OF ALL...
NO SERVICE WASH TODAY
NOT A SINGLE MACHINE HAS A SETTING FOR BURMESE CHIFFON
MY CEREMONIAL KAFTAN HAS BEEN WRECKED!

MMR: Murch Ado About Nothing?

IF EVER there were a case for a public inquiry into the MMR controversy, it is now.

The very public U-turn by Dr Simon Murch, one of the doctors whose work on bowel disease and autism first raised concerns about MMR, and his public spat last week with former collaborator Dr Andrew Wakefield showed that the two sides in the MMR controversy have never been more polarised. Parents, too, have never been more bewildered.

While Dr Murch says there is now "unequivocal evidence that MMR is not a risk factor for autism", Dr Wakefield says there is new "compelling" evidence of a link about to emerge in the group legal action against the vaccine manufacturers. The evidence is not his to reveal, he says; but advisers to the government, in their dual role as advisers to the drug companies, already know about it.

All this leaves parents in a terrible dilemma. They feel damned if they opt for the triple measles, mumps and rubella jab for their children; damned if they shun it; and, if Murch is right, damned if they opt for single vaccines too because they may leave a window of opportunity for measles or rubella to circulate.

Murch admits that he had indicated privately to some parents that he thought MMR may have been a factor in their child's autism and bowel disease. Indeed, his name appears on the study, with Professor John O'Leary, which identified measles virus in the gut of more than 70 of 91 children with "autistic enterocolitis" compared with virtually none in a control group of children.

What made him change his mind? He is emphatic that he has not been put under any pressure by the Royal Free hospital in north London, which drove out Wakefield. "If there was any pressure," he said, "it came from my new wife, who is a paediatrician. Now moving back into the world of paediatricians, I can see how our papers were being used by some to undermine vaccination."

He said what changed his mind was the emerging evidence. If measles really was a factor in so many cases, it could not be hidden from the many epidemiological studies that consistently showed no link, he told the *Eye*. In particular, he mentioned a study of more than 500,000 children born after 1991 in Denmark, and another looking at children given MMR during its short uptake in Japan, neither of which found a link.

He said his primary concern now was the potential for a reemergence of rubella, virtually eradicated by MMR. "If we allow rubella to circulate among young children through delayed vaccine administration, we will have many more cases of congenital rubella. Amid all the uncertainty and hype, the data on rubella are solid," he said.

However, one of the papers to which he referred the *Eye* points out that epidemiology is of limited use in trying to identify a link between an unusual form of autism and MMR.

Lawyers, scientists and doctors now working for the 1,000-plus families in the class action against the drug companies in Britain have always made it clear that they are only talking about a sub-set of regressive autism that has never been singled out in an epidemiological study. They have been looking at the evidence provided from the bodies of some of these children.

Eye readers will know (see *Eye* 1091) that part of the new "compelling" evidence that Wakefield was referring to is the discovery of vaccine strain measles virus in the spinal fluid – and brain – of three of the six children at the centre of the stalled high court battle, compared with only one in 20 "control" samples. But this work – described in court as "striking" – is now stalled by the withdrawal of legal aid. Families have launched their own fighting fund, to be administered through Jabs, Justice and Basic Support, to try to keep the work going.

So far the department of health is not looking at the issue. A spokesman said the Committee on Safety of Medicines keeps the safety of MMR vaccines under continual review and had considered all available evidence of which it has been made aware, published and otherwise. But it said it has no legal authority to request information which has been submitted for the court case and which has been dripping out into the public domain. It was down to the parties to submit the evidence.

This creates a Catch 22 situation because so far the families have not been able to complete the research. The discovery of vaccine strain measles virus in spinal fluid is pioneering work. It would be easy for the government to work with the families and their scientists and doctors to properly evaluate its significance. Instead, the government is making it all but impossible for the families to compare their children with a control group of "normal" children. The government could, for example, collect spinal taps and blood samples in sufficient numbers from children undergoing other investigations to provide a comparison. If vaccine strain measles virus were circulating in non-autistic healthy children, it would go a long way to countering the most damaging of the claims.

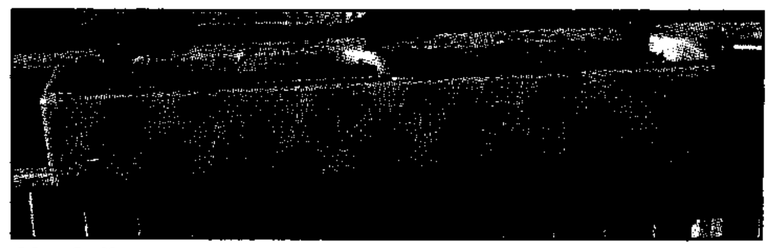
Instead the government maintains that the "scientific evidence does not support a causal link between MMR and autism or inflammatory bowel disease" and MMR is the safest way to protect our children. That may be right; but in the wake of BSE and other health crises, parents no longer trust the government. They were hoping that proof of safety would emerge in the court case that was due to take place early next year. But the withdrawal of legal aid places a question mark over public scrutiny. Instead parents will continue to vote with their feet. In some areas uptake of MMR vaccine is less than 70 percent – far less that the 95 percent needed for "herd immunity". And that is a problem for everyone.

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

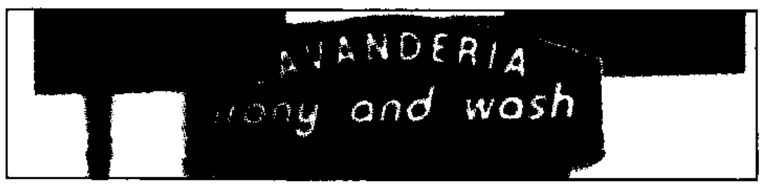
BY BIRCH

Jake and Dinos have gone too far this time! Certain subjects should be taboo!
"DEATH" THE CHAPMAN BROTHERS
TURNER PRIZE SHOW
Look at this!
I'm going to be sick!
Aaaagh!
ARTS
JAKE CHAPMAN CRITICISES TATE MODERN AND SAATCHI GALLERY ON TV!
"The Art Show" C4, 14th Nov.

I-SPY



Norfolk



Bari, Italy

Submitted by Tony Williams and Jim Cowie. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs.)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

SPARE a thought for Raymond Gubbay: public benefactor and patron of the arts whose life has been dedicated to providing common folk with that most precious gift, music. Why does everybody hate his guts?

When the great impresario recently laid on breakfast for the nation's music critics to unveil his latest benefaction – a year-round season of commercial, cheaply cast pot-boiler operas to run in English at the Savoy Theatre – he faced hostility amounting to abuse from hacks who queued up to bite the hand that was generously feeding them champagne and French pastries.

It was all so unfair. As Mr Gubbay (CBE and angling for a knighthood) patiently explained, he isn't in this for the money. The very idea! Nor is he out to steal the ENO audience with a no-frills rival in the way that Classic FM steals Radio 3's. Perish the thought! And he *certainly* isn't trying to send a message to HM government that Britain's non-commercial opera companies should have their subsidy removed on the grounds that opera can be done without it (as, of course, is possible if by "opera" you mean the commercial, cheaply-cast pot-boilers Mr Gubbay has successfully made his own).

There is clearly no truth in the suggestion that Mr Gubbay is an outspoken opponent of subsidy because his ventures don't get any. And when he said he would have no qualms about running one of his common-or-garden *Carmens* or *Barber of Sevilles* at the same time as an ENO staging (ENO being critically dependent on the box office from easy-listening shows to make up for the losses it makes it on more challenging repertory), there wasn't the slightest suggestion of "F*** you, ENO" in his tone of voice. Not at all. As he reminded us, London's West End is full of duplicated shows running in a spirit of friendly competition (that not a single example comes to mind is only lack of imagination: or something of the sort).

This duly silenced the ungrateful hacks. The sharper-witted of them, though, might have noted two odd things about the presentation. One was that, having made a great deal of the acoustic benefits of the Savoy and how it will be *so* much better for following sung-English than the great barn of ENO's Coliseum, Mr Gubbay then brought on a blowsy Russian mezzo to sing an indecipherable chunk of *Carmen* in French.

The other was that having made a similarly great deal of the fact that his operas will have the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra to guarantee quality in the pit, the small-print of the press materials revealed that this will be something "specially formed" as the Royal Philharmonic *Opera* Orchestra: which is to say, it will be administered by the RPO's orchestral fixers but packed with young musicians straight from college who have never played for the RPO-proper in their lives. What's more, the pit at the Savoy only holds 40 players, so we can expect plenty of nights when something called the RPO is miraculously appearing in two London venues at the same time. No doubt in a spirit of friendly competition.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

DOWN ON THE FARM

WE HAVE just seen, yet again, what has become the most familiar of all rituals with our agriculture ministers: the 180° U-turn on OPs, the organo-phosphorus pesticides which have seriously damaged the health of thousands of farmers.

The latest minister to go through the ritual dance is Ben Bradshaw. After taking office last summer, he seemed keen to persist with a high-level seminar on OPs, planned by his predecessor Elliott Morley for December. But recently those billed to contribute were shocked to hear of Bradshaw's decision that the seminar should be scrapped.

The ritual began in the early 1990s when it first emerged that thousands of farmers were suffering appalling ill-health after treating their sheep for parasites with OP-based sheep dips. The first minister to be told about this was John Gummer. But his officials pointed out that it would be fatal to admit that the sheep dips were dangerous, because use of the products had been made compulsory by MAFF and they had been licensed as safe by the government's Veterinary Medicines Directorate.

Gummer's response was to rescind the order making dipping compulsory, but without explaining why. The order went out that the one thing MAFF ministers must never do was admit that government-approved OPs had been responsible for a public health disaster. Junior ministers like Nicholas Soames dutifully appeared on television to claim that OPs, nerve-agents which knock out the immune system (hence their efficiency as pesticides), were no more harmful than breakfast cereals.

Gradually an influential lobby emerged, led by the Countess of Mar, herself a victim of OP poisoning, and Lib Dem MP Paul Tyler, to argue the victims' case. Unless the government came clean, they urged, the disaster would only continue. As ever more evidence piled up to show the damage OPs had caused, one minister after another became persuaded that something nasty was going on. They included Gillian Shephard and William Waldegrave. But each time, after being told by officials that to admit the truth would only provoke massive compensation claims, they fell strangely silent.

When Labour came to power in 1997, the lobbyists resumed their efforts to talk ministers into holding an independent inquiry to challenge the officials' stranglehold over the evidence. One minister who followed the case made against OPs with particular care was Baroness Hayman, who soon afterwards lost her job. Another who seemed sympathetic to the evidence produced by spokesmen for the victims, such as Liz Sigmund of the OP Information Network, was Michael Meacher.

It was he who, supported by Elliott Morley, finally agreed that a high-level seminar should be held at which the issues raised by OPs could have a proper airing. Among those due to speak was Professor Andrew Wattison of Stirling University. Last summer, when Meacher lost his job, the new minister Bradshaw at first seemed happy the conference should go ahead. But last month word went out that "the expense to the taxpayers and officials' time involved in holding a seminar on OPs at this time could not be justified when there is little new to say".

"Clearly he has been taken hostage by his civil servants," responded an angry Paul Tyler. The lawyers are "again running scared" of compensation claims against "the big chemical manufacturers and previous ministers... We believe this complacent and cowardly response is unworthy of the minister and his department." What else could he say?

'Gumboot'

TEXAS CHAINSAW MASCARA
(18) RT 2hrs 5mins
Paid Preview
Sat late show 00.00

Harrow Observer

Letters

Private Eye

Portakabin

Sir,

You get a perfectly reasonable and dignified letter from a trade marks officer requesting you not to misuse the name of his company; you head it "What a tragic way to make a living"; and you demonstrate your proudly and profoundly defiant wit by heading every other letter on the page with the name of his product. Oh how droll. Why, what a fucking tragic way to make a living indeed — yours, I mean.

MICHAEL GROSVENOR MYER,
Cambridge.

Cabin fever

Sir,

Hang on, chaps. I think you're being a bit unfair to Portakabin! I believe that under trademark law, unless they protect their trademark by, inter alia, insisting that it is spelt with an initial capital, there is a danger that the word will pass into everyday language, dictionaries, etc, and they will lose their exclusive right to it.

As a civil engineer who has spent many happy and generally comfortable hours in Portakabins, I can say that the genuine article is of a higher quality than the products of most of their (albeit, cheaper) competitors, and the trademark is worth saving to identify the real thing.

Yours aye,
JOHN HOUNSLOW,
Via email.

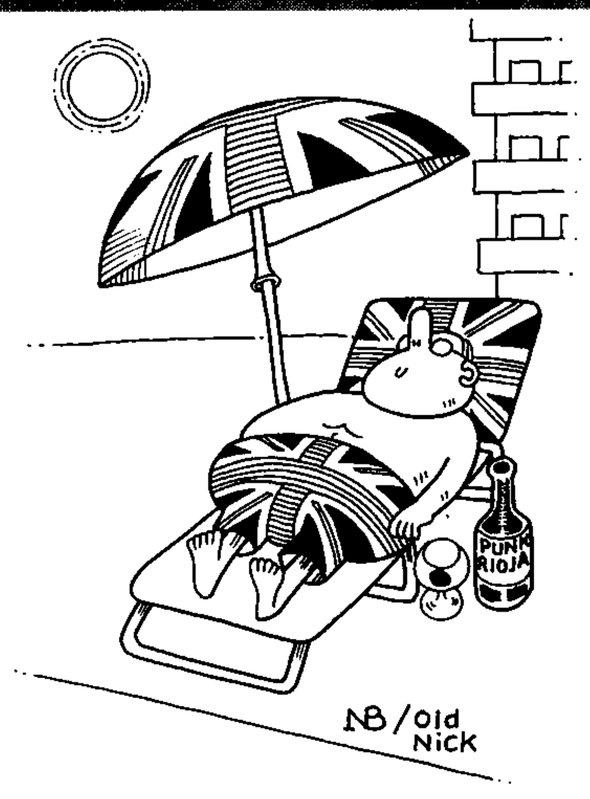
Wrong track

Sir,

*The latest episode of The Commuters (Eye 1092) contains two glaring errors – top speed on the excellent new UK high speed rail link is actually **186** mph, and it is the **loading** gauge and not the track gauge that is wider, so almost any UK standard gauge train could quite happily be hauled along the new line. I'd be very interested to hear Grizelda's excuse for such incompetence. Leaves on the drawing board or using the wrong kind of ink perhaps?*

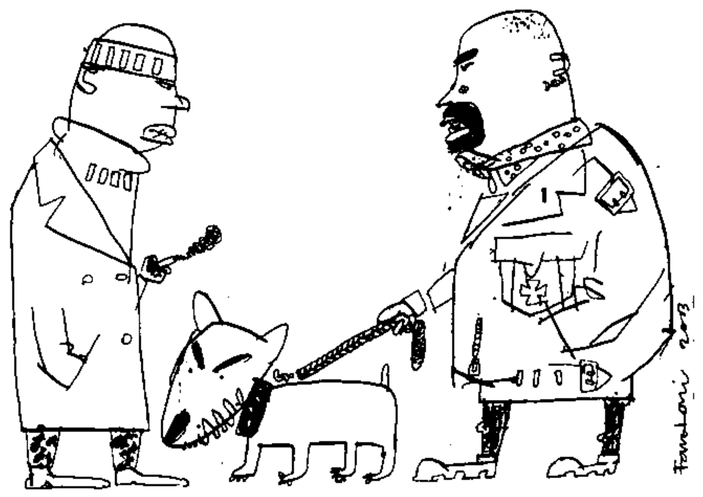
Yours faithfully,
DAVE MOOR,
Leighton Buzzard, Beds.

MODERN NURSERY RHYMES



Doctor Foster went to the Costa
In the south of Spain,
Drank some sangria and litres of beer
And went back again and again.

Scenes You Seldom See



"I always walk him on the lead. That way there's no danger he'll run into the road, attack another dog or, God forbid, harm a little kiddie"

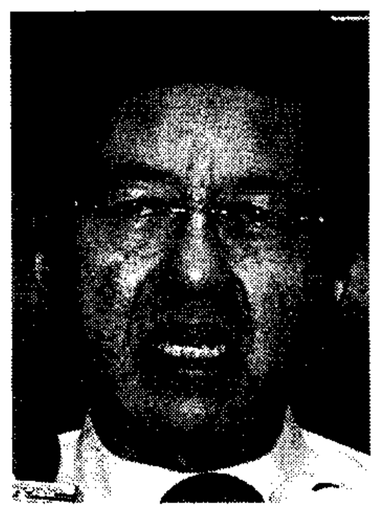
It's a lottery

Sir,

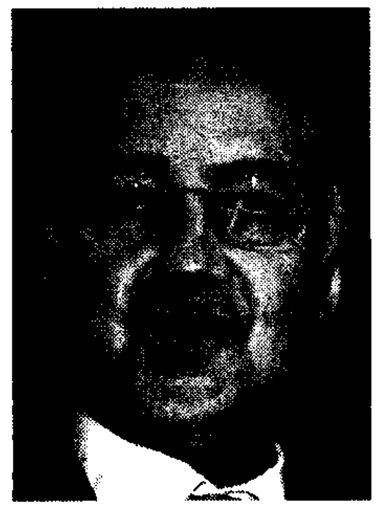
While the prospect of Paul Scofield presenting the national lottery is marginally more interesting, I think Remote Controller means Phillip Schofield. Paul Scofield is the actor who played Sir Thomas More in A Man For All Seasons.

DAVID FARMBROUGH,
Brentford.

Lookalike



New Tory Leader



Retiring Despot

Sir,

Readers may have already informed you, but... have you noticed the amazing resemblance between the new leader of the Tory party, Mahathir Mohamad, and the retiring despot prime minister of Malaysia, Michael Howard! There's something of the night about this, and we must be told.

STEVE LEE,
Via email.

PLACES OF WHORSHIP /

Tourist information, Cannes

LUVVIES

Paltrow shrugged off the criticisms. "As an artist I had a job, and that job was to tell the story with as much truth, or as close to the bone as I possibly could," she said. "Nobody was looking to commercialise Sylvia Plath's life, to exploit it. It was just for the will to get her story out there."

GWYNETH PALTROW
The Times

Submitted by APR.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

"My dad gets more parental access than your dad!"

Windsor soup

Sir,

Re: Your piece on the Tories' new Windsor PPC, Adam Afriyie. As you probably know, you shouldn't read everything you see in the papers. Worse, if you do read it, you shouldn't believe it as well. Unlike the now-famous Tory "Red Kennedy With Whisky" photo, the Oyster website is merely promoting a mostly dormant company. Maybe there is a likeness after all?

We in Windsor are all delighted with our candidate – we have no questions to ask of him and no grandees have called a meeting. And as for the complete nonsense in the national press, you probably should know that Adam has already instructed his lawyers...

I would cancel my subscription, but I've only just renewed.

DAVID J. BURBAGE,

Deputy Chairman, Windsor Conservatives.

Lookalike

Stringfellow

Mad Scientist

Sir,

I wondered whether Peter Stringfellow and the mad scientist painted by Joseph Wright could be in any way related? Obviously only good looks, and not madness, runs in the family.

Yours sincerely,
JOYCE CORSTON,

East Molesey, Surrey.

Wages of spin

Sir,

You note that Haringey has the second largest number of PR people of any local authority. Indeed. But when you have privatised as many services as Haringey has, you need lots of spin doctors to explain away the mess.

Regards,
KEITH FLETT,

London N17.

Photo opportunity

Sir,

I wonder if you may be able to help me with a research project I am undertaking, studying delegates at Conservative Party conferences. Do you, I wonder, have in your files any photographs showing the kinds of delegates who attended Conservative Party conferences four or five years ago, but no longer choose to do so?

Yours faithfully,
TERENCE LARKIN,

Via email.

From the Gnome Archive

Coming clean

Sir,

I am emailing regarding your article Under the Microscope which gives inaccurate information about the wastewater treatment carried out at Camber in East Sussex.

Southern Water runs a wastewater treatment works at Camber, which includes tertiary UV disinfection treatment. This treatment is carried out 365 days of the year and is not, as your article stated, discontinued outside the bathing season which runs from May to September.

Although it is not a requirement for Southern Water to continue the UV treatment all year round, the company made a decision to voluntarily do so and has done for a number of years.

Regards,
REBECCA BURGESS,

Press Officer, Southern Water.

Cash point

Sir,

If I had anything to do with security at Barclays I would be wondering about the coincidence of an elderly couple needlessly carrying a large amount of cash being mugged shortly after leaving a branch.

IAN LEWIS,

Via email.

THE EARLY YEARS:
MAX CLIFFORD
GEORGIE PORGIE PUDDING AND PIE, KISSED THE GIRLS AND MADE THEM CRY.
SOUNDS LIKE A NICE LITTLE EARNER.
NURSERY VERSERY
Scott Thompson.

A Barclays banker

Sir,

It is astonishing that Sir Peter Middleton, chairman of Barclays and earning £528,000 a year, should not have contributed a single penny to make up the elderly Bellacosas' loss of their entire life savings.

Perhaps he could make a matching contribution to Help The Aged – hopefully more safely than the Bellacosas, by using a simple bank transfer.

Yours sincerely,
RICHARD WARREN,

Co. Durham.

Very satirical

Sir,

I was shocked – yes, shocked – to hear on the wireless this morning that some hospital A&E departments are so chock-a-block that they have been forced to make people wait outside in tents. Surely they should be using Portakabins?

Yours sincerely,
SHAUN BEANEY,

London N8.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"He turned on a sixpence like a thoroughbred horse."
GRAHAM SELLERS, Carlton TV
(David Owen)

"And the Liverpool goalkeeper Chris Kirkland has signed a contract which will keep him at the club until the start of the next century."
SIMON BROTHERTON, Radio 5 Live
(Stephen Killick)

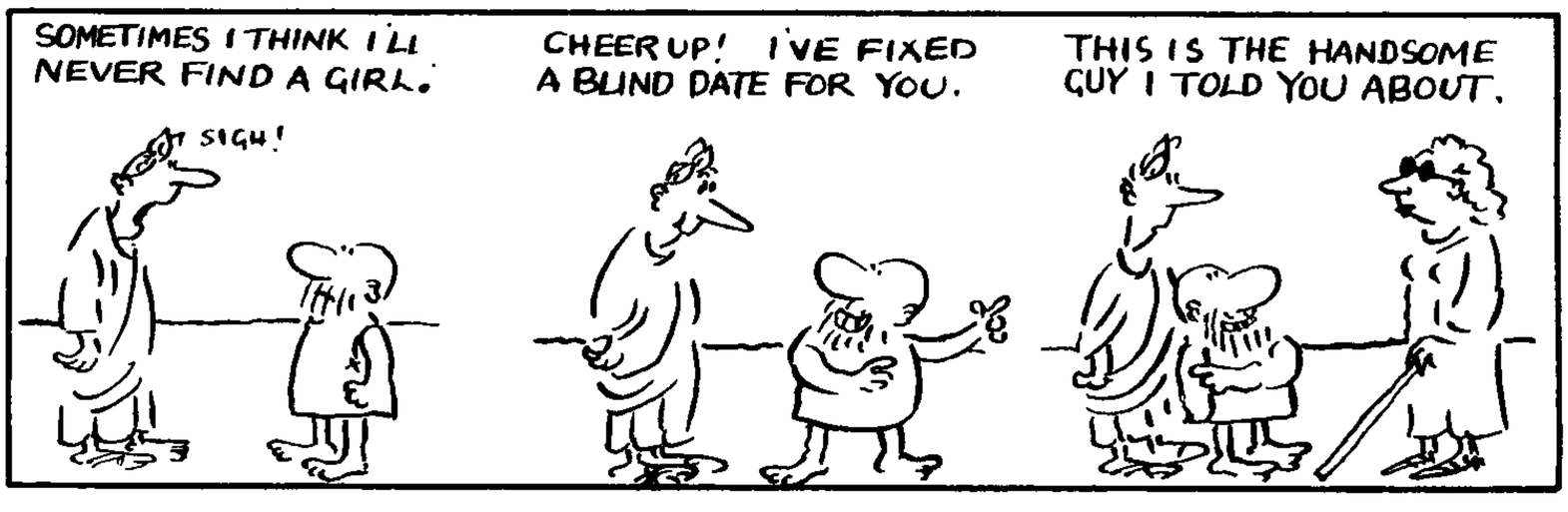
"I'm not going to pick out anyone in particular, but Jay Jay Okocha should not be the captain of a football club."
RODNEY MARSH, Sky Sports
(Daniel Howdon)

"I support Michael Howard for the leadership. He's highly articulous..."
Conservative voter, BBC2
(David Withey)

"He [Henrik Larson] was on the six-yard line, just two yards away from the goal."
PAT NEVIN, Radio 5 Live
(Paul Marek)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN


SOMETIMES I THINK I'LL NEVER FIND A GIRL.
SIGH!
CHEER UP! I'VE FIXED A BLIND DATE FOR YOU.
THIS IS THE HANDSOME GUY I TOLD YOU ABOUT.

Letter from **Pyongyang**

from Our Own Correspondent

PRESIDENT George W. Bush says he "hates" our Dear Leader, Kim Jong Il, and that North Korea forms part of the world "axis of evil". But if Kim is rattled, he has a funny way of showing it.

Our television station continues to show endless films of him personally directing great construction projects and taking the salute from our million-strong army on National Day in Kim Il Sung Square – named after our Eternal President, the Great Leader and Kim's very dead old man, to whom visiting dignitaries must still pay homage as he lies in his crystal coffin.

A few months ago a wild rumour spread that Kim Jong Il had been taken ill. Our bouffant-haired leader wasn't seen at all for nearly three months. Given the total control of the media, the military and the party, Kim could be dead for all we know. Just to be on the safe side, our one-party state, which so famously developed the hereditary principle for Marxist-Leninists, is already grooming a successor to Kim, called, er, Kim – from the family firm, of course.

But predictions of his demise, and that of our socialist utopia, are some way off the mark. Yes, the economy is in free fall, save only for a thriving trade in weapons to countries and rebel groups barred by international sanctions from buying elsewhere. But the descent into poverty actually helps. Combined with the effects of drought five years ago, when two or three million died – around a tenth of the population – most of us are too hungry to worry about politics and too smart to take on such a ruthless system.

In the north, we have all the raw materials, while our decadent brothers and sisters in the capitalist south were left with the paddy fields. But efforts to revive our obsolete industries have been disappointing. We hoped for help from China, but our chosen tycoon partner was hauled off to face embezzlement charges in Beijing. We even turned to old enemy Japan; but when Kim admitted that the secret services – Room 35 as they are known – had kidnapped some Japanese citizens during the 1970s, relations collapsed.

We haven't fared that much better with the south. A minor thaw in relations has seen a trickle of cross-border visitors in search of long-lost family members. And Hyundai's boss helped us with a spanking new gymnasium in Pyongyang before allegations of corruption prompted his recent suicide.

Our strategy for staving off total economic collapse is to play nuclear roulette with the Americans, who reneged on their promise to deliver oil and a light water reactor to compensate for the closure of our nuclear programme. We already have enough processed uranium to put together six or seven devices. And if our Dear Leader decides to switch on our reactor at Yongbyong, we could turn that number out every three or four months!

Our Dear Leader may be quirky (and his playboy, kidnapping past still haunts him); but as Madeleine Albright, the former US secretary of state who on her visit clapped along to some robust patriotic songs about the ultimate doom facing the US imperialist evil, remarked – he is rational, intelligent and has a sense of humour. And the reason that the prospect of Armageddon keeps Kim laughing is that he believes it is the lever that will deliver the non-aggression pact with the US he craves.

So he keeps our artillery pointed at the South Korean capital, Seoul, and his long-range missiles pointed at Tokyo. He may budge if the price is right. But the price would have to be pretty good. For as the Dear Leader and so many fellow members of his family who fill up top posts in government know only too well, if there were no longer an American threat on the border, what rationale would remain for the Kim dynasty?

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "Of course, we would ideally like to run an extra train between Dahanu and Virar," a spokesman for Western Railway told reporters in Palghar, "but we don't have any spare locomotives at the moment. However, our customers kept telling us that they wanted an extra train, and we always listen to our customers, so we decided to put an extra service in the new timetable, leaving Dahanu at 19:50 and arriving at Virar at 21:00. Okay, it only runs on paper for now, but isn't that better than nothing? Next year, we're hoping to buy a new train, and then perhaps it will run in reality too."

But Ashok Churi of the Indian Railways Luggage Pass and Passengers' Association was not satisfied with this explanation. "The Western Railway is cheating passengers," he said, "and it's wasting their time. Yesterday there were over a thousand passengers at Dahanu station, waiting to board the 19:50, but no train came. Western Railway's advertising slogan is 'You Will Be Chuffed'. But I think it should be 'Our Company Has Gone Off the Rails'." *(The Week [India], 21/9/03. Spotter: Keith Hobbs)*

– ● –

● "There is overwhelming evidence that you are a devious pervert," Judge Manus Boyce told police sergeant James Arthur Marriner as he passed sentence on him in Brisbane District Court. "You realised that the Christian Brethren are innocent and wide-eyed people who lead sheltered and unworldly lives, and you cynically took advantage of their naivety. So although they thought they were helping the police with an undercover investigation into drug dealing, they were really being used to satisfy your vile and peculiar sexual tastes."

Earlier, defence barrister Stephen Kissick had argued that "my client's behaviour might have been rude and disgusting, but it wasn't technically criminal. About a year ago, he became involved with members of the Christian Brethren, and they agreed to help him with an undercover drug investigation. Admittedly, his recruiting procedures were unusual, requiring each new recruit to pose naked for identification photos, to fill out detailed questionnaires about their sex lives, and to give him various bodily samples including urine and pubic hair. But these were all consenting adults, and they didn't object, even when he rubbed a special 'antidote' cream into some of the women's bodies, and asked one woman to masturbate, so that a vaginal swab could be taken when she climaxed. She even agreed to let him video her, because he said that he had to prove to his bosses at police headquarters that the swab had been taken correctly. The Christian Brethren lead very quiet lives, and many of them enjoyed the excitement of being asked to drop off special packages for secret agents, and to write messages in invisible

ink, because it made them feel important and they thought they were doing some good. So where is the crime here?"

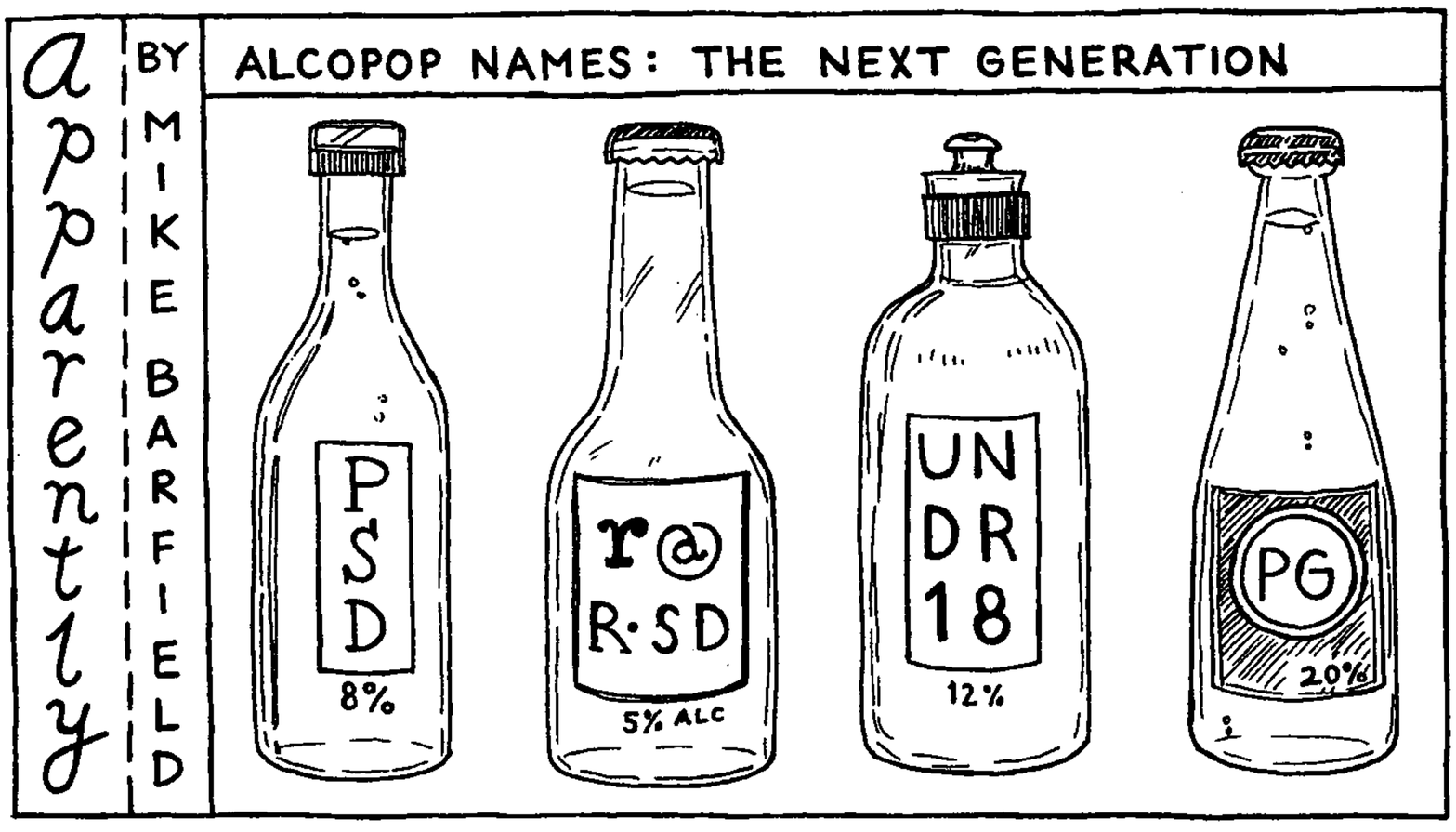
Despite his protestations, Marriner was found guilty of fraud, misappropriation, indecent assault, and false pretences, and was jailed for five years. *(The Australian, 2/10/03. Sotter: Peter Knight)*

– ● –

● *"It's a good arrangement," Mustafa Tarek Hammu told reporters in Ceuta, "because everyone benefits. The Guardia Civil let me swim along the coast to Morocco without interference, and they turn a blind eye to my smuggling. And in return, I save them the trouble of fishing dead bodies out of the sea. Which is important, because otherwise the corpses would eventually wash up on the beach, and become a health hazard."*

Mustafa was describing the unusual trade agreement he has forged with the police in this Spanish outpost on the Moroccan coast. "The gap between Africa and Europe is only eight miles wide here, so people are constantly trying to get across. And sadly, many of them drown. Spanish police patrols used to have to spend all day looking for corpses, but now I save them the trouble. In return, they let me smuggle whisky and rum into Morocco, which helps me, because otherwise the Moroccan border customs confiscate everything."

A Spanish police officer confirmed the existence of this informal arrangement. "Smugglers like Mustafa are not really harming anyone, so we take a laissez-faire attitude. It's the human traffic coming the other way that we're worried about, and he helps us combat it." (Costa Blanca News, 3-9/10/03. Spotter: Stuart Luxton)



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo!

And I am sure everyone in the parish will want to join me in congratulating our treasurer Mr Brown and his good lady Sarah on the birth of their son John Smith Brown.

It's always a matter for particular rejoicing when an elderly parishioner finally manages to get married and have a child and, of course, we are all very happy for Gordon!

But isn't there a danger that an older father may get rather too carried away by the experience of fatherhood and start imagining that he is the only person who has ever had a baby?

I mean, you don't see the rest of us going on and on about nappies and sleepless nights, do you?

Or calling in the local newspaper to take endless pictures of the proud father posing with the baby in his arms?

Isn't there rather a good verse in the scriptures where one of the old prophets says "Been there, done that"?

I have to say, those wise words rang rather a bell in my mind when I saw all those pictures of Gordon grinning away like a monkey instead of putting on that usual dour, miserable expression that suits him so much better.

When Cherie and I produced our *fourth* child (before Gordon had even got round to getting married, I might add!), you didn't see me prancing about, showing off little Leo to all the world, and posing for pictures romping with him on the floor of the vicarage.

We hear a lot these days about 'post-natal depression', don't we?

But isn't there another condition just as worrying called 'post-natal elation', where a new father gets so full of himself that he begins to think that he can do anything, including other people's jobs!

I don't want to tell tales out of school, but I was a little surprised to be told that Gordon was actually demanding a place as of right on my special NEC working group (New Evangelical Convention).

This was quite embarrassing for me, because Gordon knows perfectly well that this is a committee only for people I can really trust, and that the last thing we need is anyone trying to make trouble at our meetings by challenging the general line that we've agreed amongst myself!

There's always someone at a meeting who wants to raise some point of order about something trivial, like whether we should have the collection in euros or not.

Goodness me, we could talk all night about that one, couldn't we, and still get no

nearer to a decision!

Z-z-z-z-z, Gordon on that one! As it says in the New Labour Bible, "Get real!" *(Book of Wislon, 4.16).*

So, sorry Gordon! As it says in another memorable passage from the Good Book, "Many are called, but only one is chosen" *(Revelations of St Antony The Divine, 24.2).*

And that applies, not just to some silly committee, but to the most important job of all!

So, let's all pray that in a few days time Mr Brown will be coming down to earth, forgetting about his baby and getting back to doing the modest but useful job in the parish administration that he is being paid for!

Yours,

Tony

(not forgetting little Leo!)

A Message From Rev. Dubya, the Grand Tabernacle, Salt Tears City

My fellow Righteous Brothers in Englandland!
I am greatly looking forward to my visit to your beautiful country, wherever it is! Mrs Dubya and I are counting the days until we can break bread with you and take a tour of your fabled heritage sites:

- Windsor Palace
- Buckingham Castle
- the Leaning Tower of Harrods
- Shakespeare-upon-Avon

Brother Rumsfeld says he is very sorry not to be with us on this occasion, but he and Sister Condy are having to stay home to keep ever vigilant lest Satan creeps in in the middle of the night "seeking whom he may devour"!

Yours in the Lord!
Rev. Dubya

BONFIRE NIGHT

There was a very good turn-out for our parish bonfire night, which was greatly enjoyed by all. This year, we advertised our display as "The Fireworks Of Mass Destruction", which meant that everyone had to stand around gazing into the sky imagining that they were looking at the most awesome fireworks show they had ever seen (complete with poison gas!).

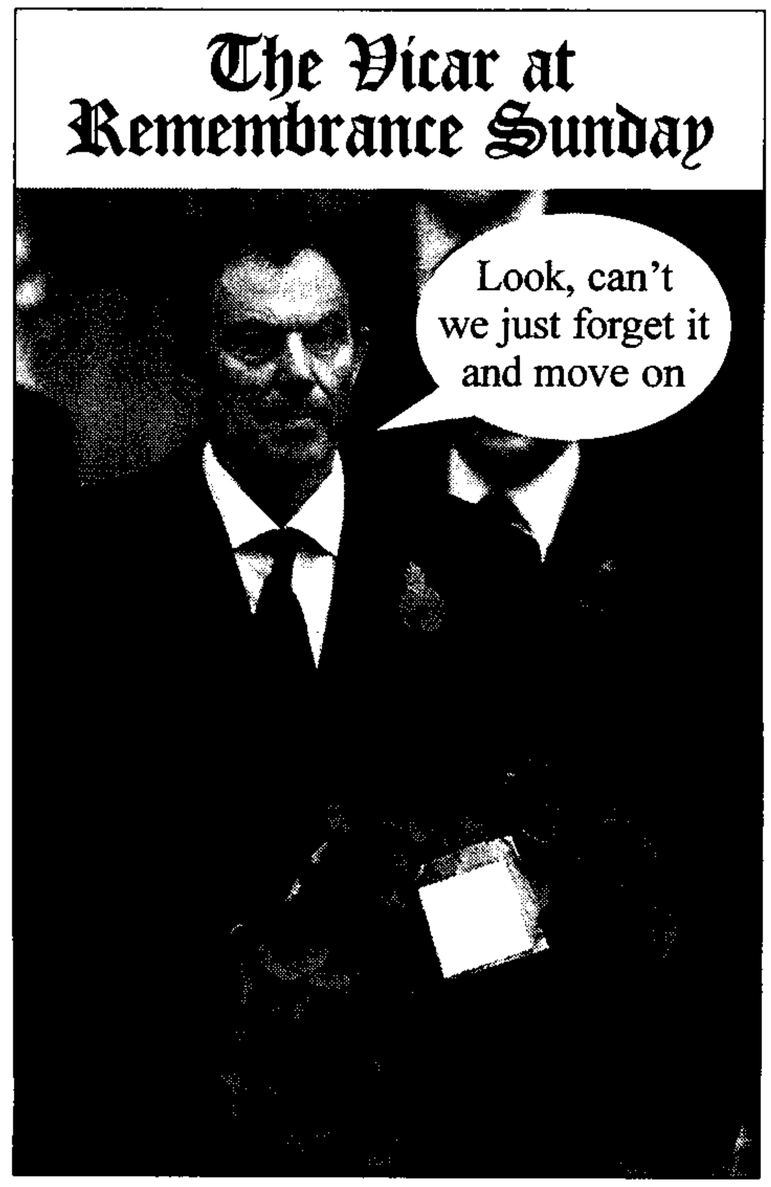
The 'guy' was made up to look like Saddam Hussein, but unfortunately he disappeared at the last minute and, despite looking all over the parish, he couldn't be found.

Still, everyone had a marvellous time, and many thanks to Mrs Abbott for providing the homemade humbugs which were especially enjoyed by the children. T.B.

St Albion's Welcome Rev. Dubya!

Mr Straw writes: We are all hugely looking forward to the visit which is shortly to be paid to the parish by our good friend the Rev. Dubya of the Church of the Latter-Day Morons.

I know that a tiny minority of 100,000 or so troublemakers are thinking of trying to spoil what should be a wonderful day of celebration, so let me just warn them that the long-range weather forecasters are predicting torrential rain, hurricane winds, deadly lightning and a possible collision with a 75-million-tonne asteroid! So it is my advice to any would-be troublemakers that they would be well advised to stay at home and watch the Rev. Dubya driving down the High Street with the Vicar in glorious sunshine on our local TV news! J.S.



GLENDA SLAGG

■ **CHARLES – leave him alone for gawd's sake. The poor old Prince is only trying to do his best and what's his reward!!?!? To be pilloried in the press by every pea-brained palace pooftah with an axe to grind??!? Give him a break Mr *Pressman* and concentrate on the real news for a change – ie, Are Becks And Posh Washed Up??!!**

■ ARE BECKS AND POSH washed up??!?!?! Who cares??!!! When there are more burning issues to cover, like 'Is Chazza A Right Royal Shirtlifter'??!??!! Come on, Mr Pressman, we have a right to know and don't spare our blushes??!!!! It's high time this pampered prince was revealed in his true colours, ie pink!!! Geddit??!?!?! Prince of Wales??!?!! More like the Ponce of Wales!??!? No offence, Your Royal Highness, and after all you do work tirelessly for charity and cannot answer back!!?! Hats off to you!!?!

■ *DIANE ABBOTT – the Hackney Hypocrite!!!?! Telling us all to send our toddlers to the local sink school whilst she's shelling out taxpayers' money to buy a better deal for her little brat!!?!?! Do the decent thing, Diane, and shoot yourself!!?!?!*

■ **THREE CHEERS for Diane Abbott?!?! At last, there's one New Labour mum who's not afraid to put her kiddie above her principles!!?!? Who wouldn't do the same if they were in her shoes??!?! Every mum wants the best for her little 'un and anyone who says different is a hypocrite!!?!?!?**

■ AAAH!!! BLESS??!?! Didn't you have a little weep when you saw Macca, Heather and her little bundle of money??!?!!!? *(Surely 'joy'? Ed.)*

■ *READ IDS's new novel??!?!? It makes Jeffrey Archer look like Charles Dickens!!?!?! And that's saying something!!?? Glenda's rating: z-z-z-z-z-z.*

■ HERE THEY ARE – Glenda's Poppy Idols (Geddit!!?!?!?)

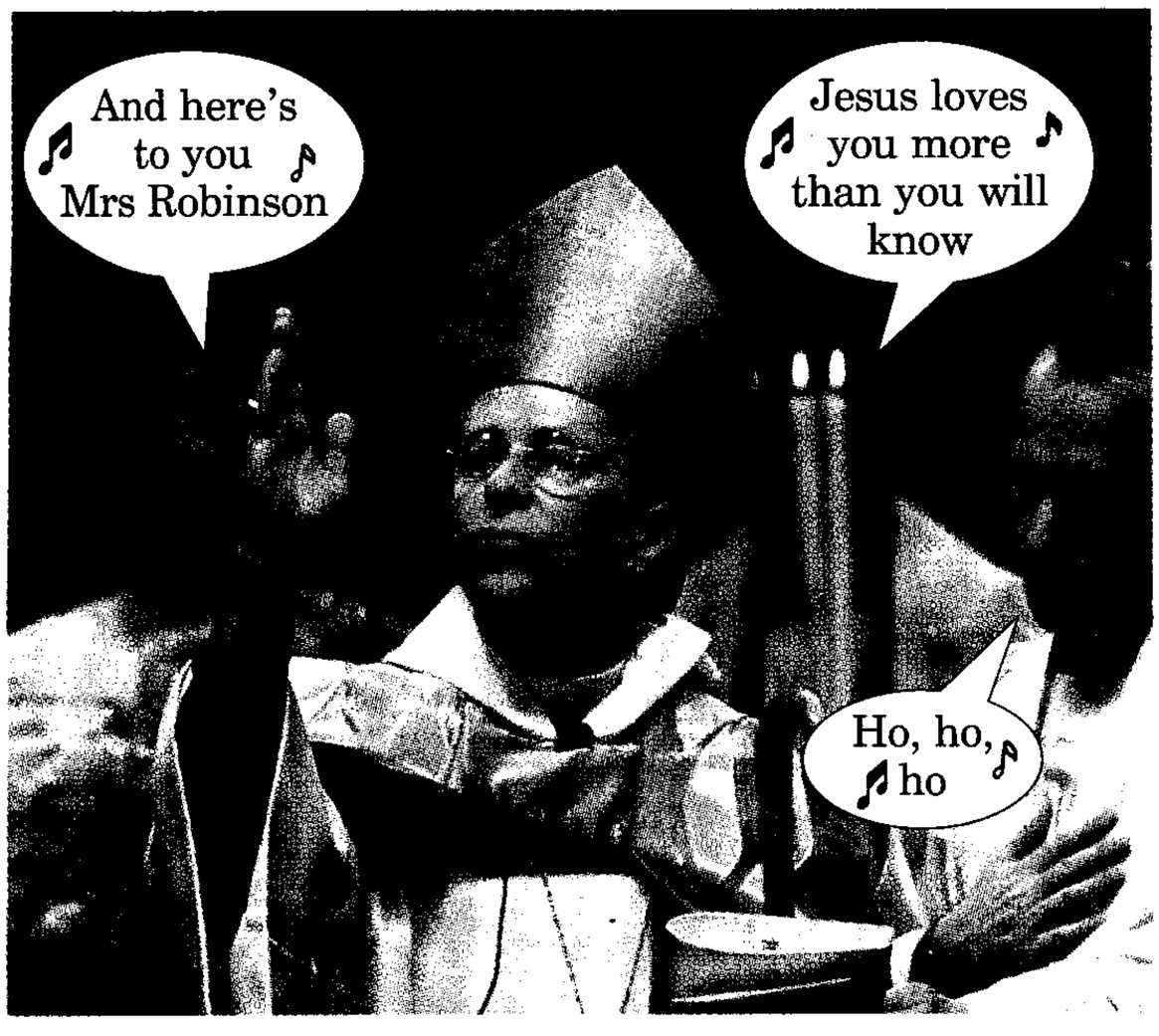
● **Bishop Gene Robinson** – You weren't always gay, were you??!? So why not let Aunty Glenda put you back on the straight and narrow!???! Geddit???!??!

● **Maurice Saatchi** – You're the new Chairman of the Conservative Party!???!? Pop round to my place, Mr Ad Man, and I can say "I 'ad' you"!??! Geddit????!?

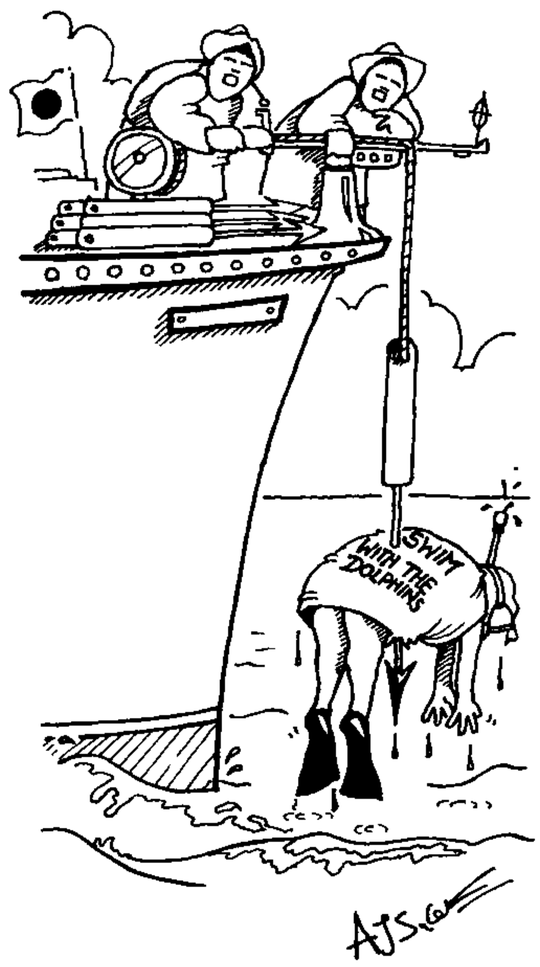
● **Sir Ranulph Twistleton Wickham Fiennes** – Crazy name, crazy marathon-running guy!!!

Byeeee!!!

THE GRADUATE



CHARLES: THE PROOF



Blair's Top Ex-Spin Doctor **ALASTAIR CAMPBELL** joins the Eye's team to offer his unique insights into Britain's political scene. Read him today.

WHY MICHAEL HOWARD HASN'T GOT A FUCKING HOPE

I'VE got some advice for you, Four Eyes. Fuck off.

© World copyright A. Campbell 2003.

ME AND MY SPOON

THIS WEEK

MICHAEL PORTILLO

Are you keen on spoons?

Well, there was a time of course when I simply did not have the time for spoons, and now that my life has changed I find myself having to reassess my whole attitude to spoons – and may I add not just spoons. Knifes, forks and even ladles are all things to which I hope to devote more attention in the future.

Are you saying that politics stopped you developing an attitude towards spoons?

That's a very good point. You can get very much bogged down in party politics and lose sight of the things that really matter – like spoons. There's no way I could go back to the front bench now that I've had a chance to go round the country and see for myself just what sort of spoons ordinary people find relevant to their lives.

Did making the TV programme "Spoon Swap" alter your views in any way?

I think it's fair to say "Yes". It was fantastic to have to stir my tea with a dirty old plastic spoon from Woolworths whilst watching the other people trying to come to terms with my Spanish spoon created by Los Spoonos in Toledo. It was humbling really.

Do you think Michael Howard is a spoon man?

I think you'd have to ask Michael that. I hope that he's going to be more open to a whole raft of spoons, rather than just the narrow old-fashioned range of spoons that did so much to damage us in the public's eyes.

Will we be seeing more of your spoons on television?

Well it's early days but I am in talks with a number of production companies about new TV shows – one idea is for me to present a show where I go into celebrities' houses and you have to guess who the celebrity is by looking at their spoons.

Has anything amusing ever happened to you in connection with a spoon?

I think that was a long time ago and we've all moved on from that sort of thing.

NEXT WEEK: Sir Michael Peat – *"Me and My Peat."*

NATION STUNNED BY COUNT'S MAKEOVER

by Our Political Staff **Doris Karloff**

AWESTRUCK reporters were today invited into the castle of the once-notorious Count Dracula, to meet the man who has just emerged from one of the most dramatic makeovers of modern times.

Gone were the cobwebs, the bats and the creepy organ music.

Gone too was the coffin in which he liked to take a quick afternoon nap in the days when he was Home Secretary.

The Count too has changed his looks from the days when his protruding teeth, deathly white skin and hypnotic eyes terrified TV audiences all over Transylvania.

The Count has dispensed with his black cloak and silver-topped cane.

He now sports rimless spectacles and jeans, and smiles affably as he welcomes his journalist guests.

"Hi," he says. "I'm Michael Howard. I'm a regular kind of vampire. Can I offer you a glass of blood?"

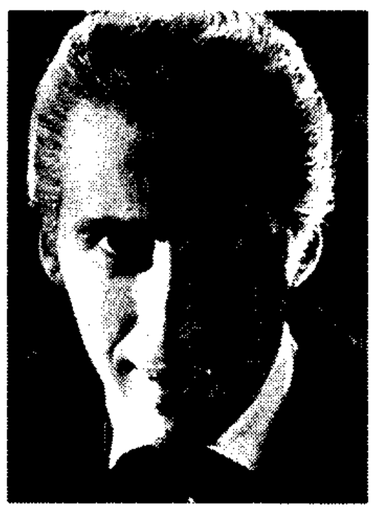
"He means coffee," laughs his stunningly beautiful former '60s model wife, as she hands round a selection of delicious, chocolate-covered bat nibbles.

"People have got the wrong idea about me," says the Count. "All that stuff about bloodsucking and being nasty to Ann Widdecombe – it's all in the past.

"The world has changed since the 15th century when I was last in power under Thatch The Impaler – and I've changed with it."

"We in the modern Vampire Party have to be inclusive, caring, compassionate and ready to listen to what the villagers are saying.

"Please excuse me," the Count smiled, "but I have to leave you now, as the sun is coming up and I've got a meeting in the crypt."



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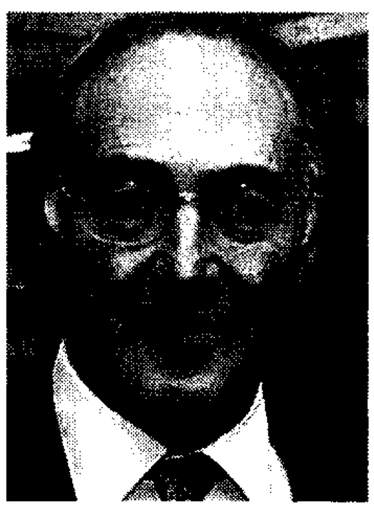
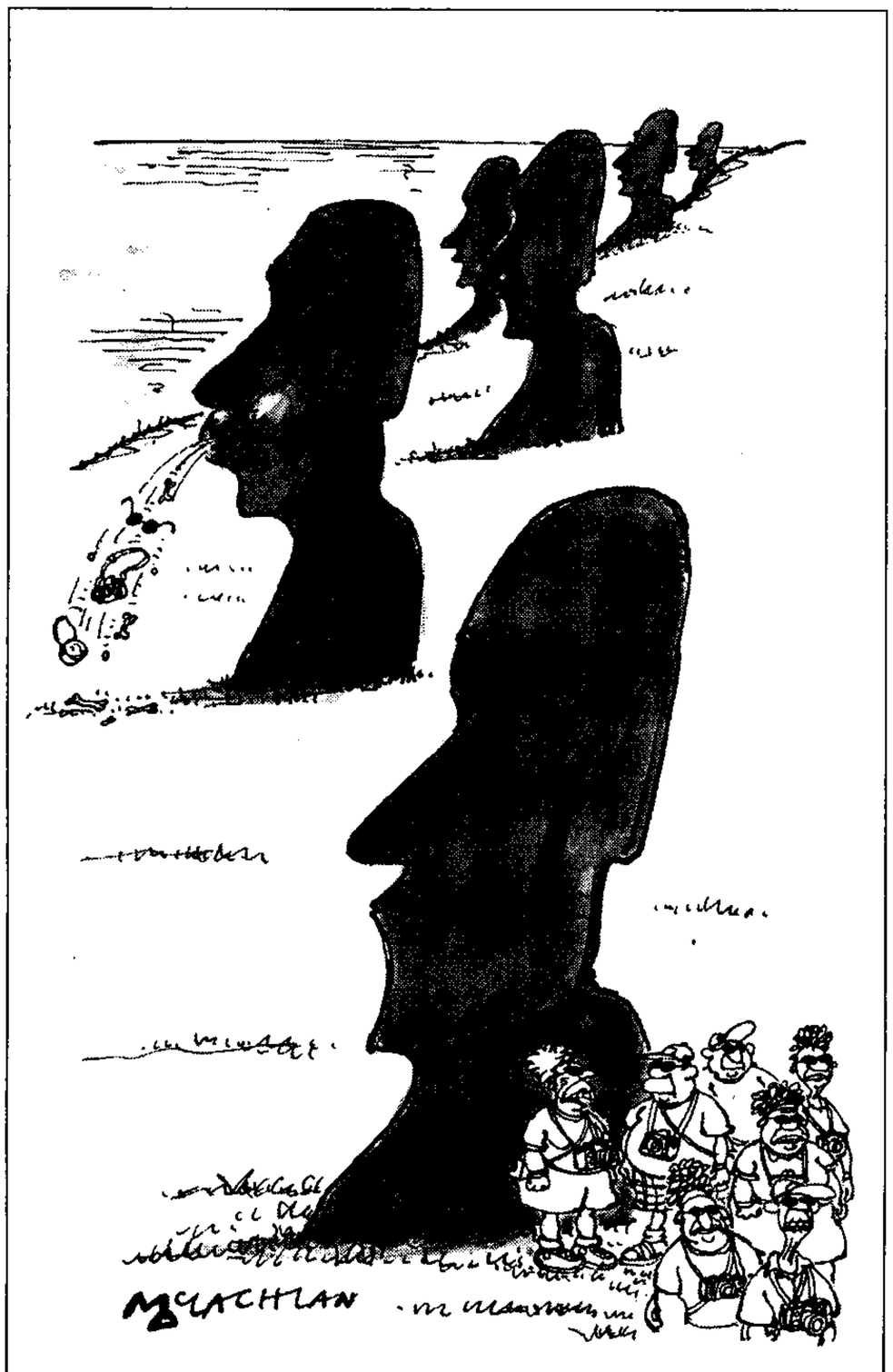


After



"Has anyone seen my Alvin?"

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam
One of the Righteous Brothers

So. Farewell
Then one of the
Righteous Brothers.
I am not sure
Which of the
Two
You were.

You might have been
One of them
Or possibly
The other.

Anyway, you've lost
That loving feeling
That was
Your catchphrase.
Now whichever one you
are not

Has lost
His brother
Which is
Very sad.

E.J. Thribb (17½ rpm)

100 Years of The Moron

FOR A CENTURY the Daily Moron has been a unique window on our world. Through war and peace, through good times and bad times, through breakfast all the way to lunch, the Moron has told the story how it was.

Now, in a unique cut-out-and-throw-away souvenir section, we revisit some of the great stories that made the paper what it is today.

2000

MORON MAN FILLS BOOTS IN SHARE SCAM

2001

MORON MAN NOT SACKED

2002

MORON MAN STILL IN JOB

2003

MORON MAN STILL NOT SACKED – Experts Baffled

Yes, these are some of the proudest moments in the Moron's history – the kind of paper that would make its former giants proud – legends like Robert Maxwell and er... *(cont'd p. 94)*

Happy 100TH

from Cindy Mellons – TV's Linda Saveloy from

Footballers' Au Pairs

'I wanted to say how brilliant the Moron is because otherwise they would make up a story about me and put it in their rotten paper'

CRIME UPDATE

KNACKER SWOOPS ON BISHOP

by Our Crime Staff **Nick Nobody**

INSPECTOR "Knacker of the Yard" Knacker today carried out a dawn raid on the home of the Bishop of Neasden, the Right Reverend J.C. Flannel.

Said Knacker, "We were acting on a tip-off from a reader of the *Neasden Echo and Argus* who told us that the Bishop had been inciting people to round up gays and put them on their bonfires."

Knacker continued, "Using the very latest investigative techniques, we were able to track the Bishop down to where he lives and told him he was being arrested under the EU Incitement to Homophobia Directive 1997 No. 764234 sub-section B."

Bishop's Crook

Knacker concluded, "The public have a right to be protected from these sorts of Bishops and it is our job to make sure that the streets of Neasden are safe for gay men and women to go about their business without being murdered by senior members of the clergy."

WHAT THE BISHOP SAID

"I think that you know in a real sense some gay people might benefit from some sort of therapy but then again who knows? It's a very tricky one."

STAFF SUPPORT CHARLES

Happy 100TH

from Darren Carson – ex-striker for 3rd division Ilchester United

Congratulations! I love the Moron because I can't read. Long may you continue

CRUISE OF A LIFETIME TURNS TO HORROR

by Our Nautical Staff
Samuel Taylor Cholera

WHAT should have been a fun-filled voyage of discovery last night became a living nightmare as all the passengers on a cruise ship fell ill and died.

Said the sole survivor, an Ancient Mariner, "It must have been something we ate – probably the albatross which was on the menu for dinner."

"It was a real shame when everyone dropped dead because I'd been looking forward to this holiday for years.

Phew Water Water Everywhere!

"But instead of eating at the captain's table I ended up surrounded by rotting corpses as the ship drifted aimlessly around the Mediterranean."

Added the Mariner, "It really is the last time I travel with P&O."

Happy 100TH

from Andy Bastable – TV's Detective Inspector Gary Arkwright from *Peak Heartbeat*

I love the Moron because it gets my picture in the paper

TURNER PRIZE 2003
CHILDREN AND PEOPLE OF A NERVOUS DISPOSITION PLEASE LOOK AWAY!
ROLL UP! ROLL UP! LADIES AN' GENTLEMEN – SEE THE BLOW JOB OF THE CENTURY!
RULES FOR THOSE EXHIBITING FOR THE TURNER PRIZE
1 ALL LITTLE GIRLS MUST BE SHOWN WITH MALE GENITALIA!
2 SWEARING IS OBLIGATORY
3 ANY SIGN OF CLASSICAL DRAWING OR PAINTING WILL BE CRUSHED!
BY ORDER OF SEROTA
YOU FIFTH RATE MAGGOT, I WILL MAKE YOU WISH YOU'D NEVER LIVED
DO YOU WISH TO SEE OUR SPANISH DEALERS?
HI WE'RE ON THE MAKE
THE RUNNING MAN ADDRESSES THE COMPLEXITIES OF LIVING IN A DIVIDED SOCIETY
WHATEVER
COOL!
RE-RUN VIDEO
RE-RUN
RE-RUN
WE'VE FOUND THE BODY OF YOUR CHILD.
by GRAYSON PERRY
I THINK THESE VASES COULD WIN IT. THEY'VE GOT LITTLE GIRLS SWEARING, WITH MALE GENITALIA, AND A CHILD SHOWING HER KNICKERS.
COOL
THE HORRORS OF THE CONTEMPORARY ART WORLD THIS PORTRAYS THE CHAPMAN BROTHERS BEING GARROTTED BY THE YOUNG GOYA FOR MINDLESSLY PISSING ABOUT WITH HIS GREAT ETCHINGS 'THE HORRORS OF WAR'
A LATE ENTRY
HEATH

What You Will Not Read in the Sun

THE Sun SAYS

Time to live in the 21st century

IT MAY have been alright for the Middle Ages, but frankly, in the world of 2003 the old-fashioned hereditary principle looks as out of place as spats and a top hat.

The idea that someone could expect to take over the job just because his Dad was the King of the Castle before him is rightly viewed as obscene.

There is no other word for it.

Obscene

Today we do not need a world in which we are expected to bow the knee to some spoiled brat for the sole reason that he happened to be born into the right family at the right time.

This is the kind of fawning old-school tie snobbery that has strangled this country for centuries, making it the laughing stock of the world.

What we want and expect is a Britain in which the only thing which counts is talent, merit and ability, the three 'T's.

We deplore the decision of Her Majesty the Queen to nominate Prince Charles for the most important job in British life just because he is her son.

The Sun Says – Wake up Your Maj and give the job to James Murdoch!

On Other Pages

- ***Wrong Kind of Leaves on the Page Three Girl!***
- ***See Nipples and Die!*** *Naked Pompeii lovelies tell all to Robert Harris*
- ***Win a Night Out with the Gay Bishop!***

ALL THIS AND MORE IN BRITAIN'S FAVOURITE FAMILY PAPER!!!

(the family in question being that of Mr Murdoch)

Gnome
PRINCESS DIANE Plate Offer

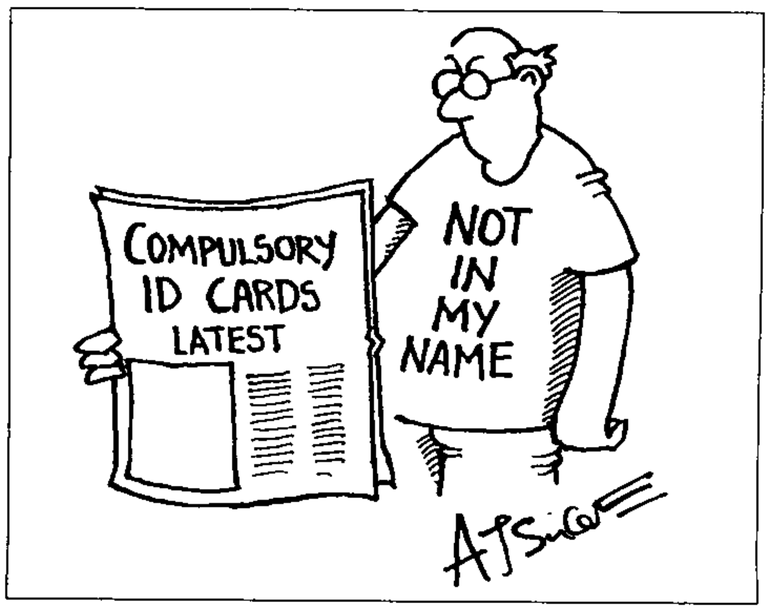
IN 2003 Princess Diane Abbott won the hearts of the nation when she bravely opted to send her son to a private school, despite her lifelong belief that such establishments should be abolished. Now Gnome Plates commemorates this act of fearless courage which has become a historic milestone in our island story.

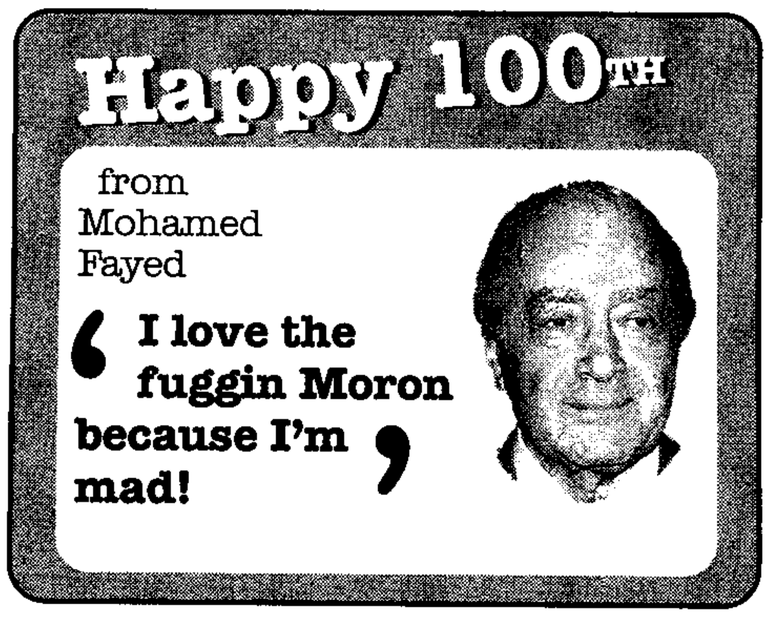
Now world-famous plate designer Sir Geraldo Scarfoni of the Institut Ceramique de Limoges has produced a unique iconic image of the "Queen of Hypocrites", which will be treasured for generations to come.

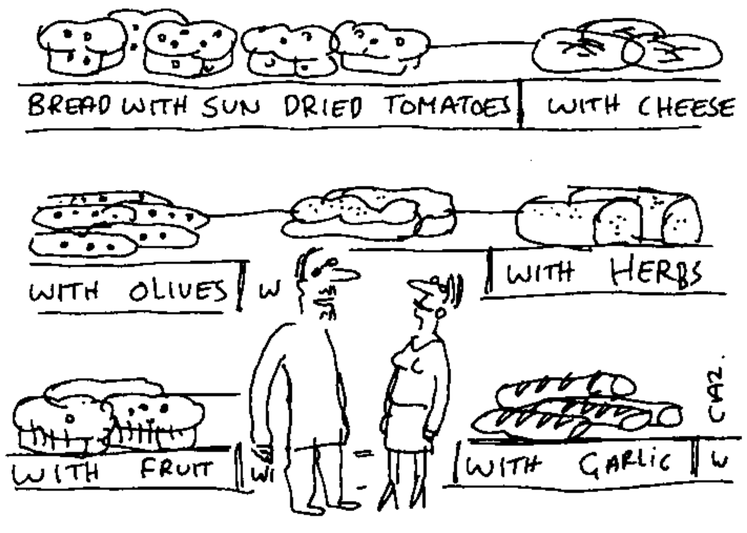
***PLUS* free with every Diane plate ordered, three 'IDS for PM' mugs (now, owing to unforeseen circumstances, surplus to requirements).**

Price: £89.99 (plus p&p, plus VAT)

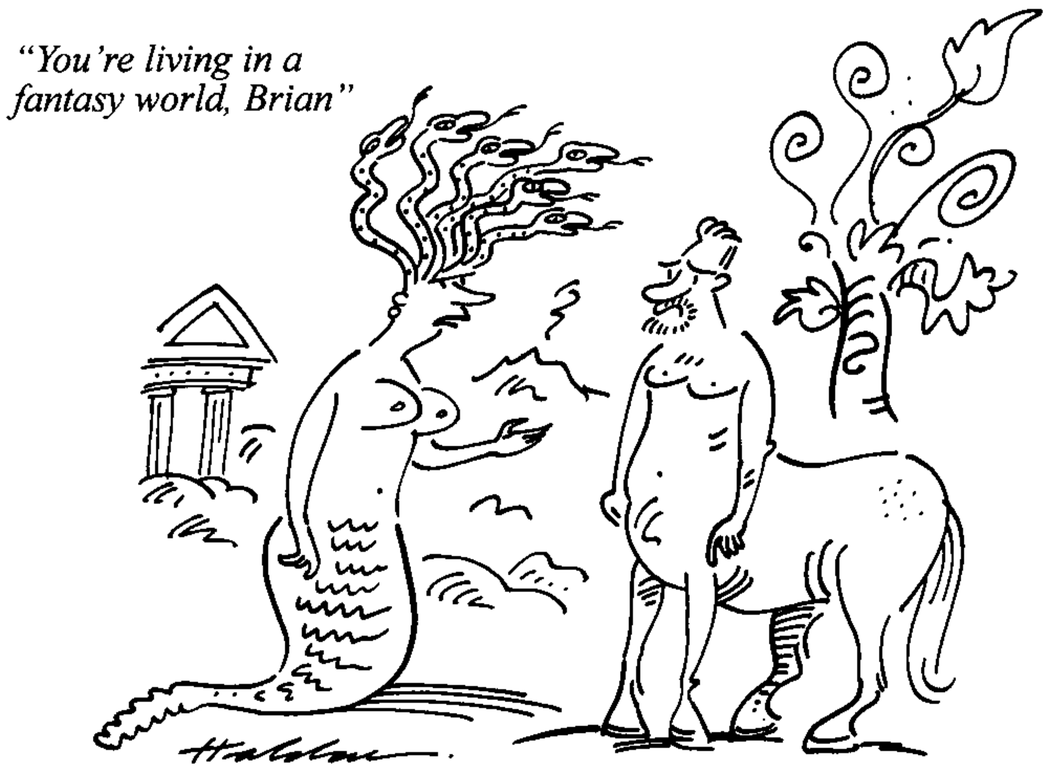
Send to Gnome Lady Di Plate Offer,
Unit 94, Patricia Hewitt Trading Estate, Sunningdale, Berks.







"You can live by bread alone"



TORY PARTY RECOVERS FROM NASTY COUGH

by Our Political Staff **Benny Lin, Meg O'Zone, T.C.P. Linctus, E.U. Calyptus** and **Lady Covonia Syrup**

THE CONSERVATIVE Party, which for months has been on its deathbed with a seemingly terminal Cough, has made a miraculous recovery.

The Cough, which threatened to end the Party's life, has now completely disappeared after emergency treatment by Dr Acula, the distinguished Transylvanian specialist.

Cough-In

Mr Iain Duncan Cough, who came from nowhere to become a successor to such titans as Winston Churchill, Margaret Thatcher and John Major, was known as "The Quiet Man" for his oratorical technique of saying nothing at all, punctuated by the occasional nervous cough to indicate to his followers that he was still there.

Now he isn't.

Our Medical Correspondent DR UTTERFRAUD on what happens when a political party recovers from a nasty Cough.

IN THE initial stages, the patient experiences an extraordinary feeling of euphoria as the miseries of living with the Cough wear off.

The patient feels healthy, fit and ready for anything. Sadly, however, this sense of elation is short-lived, and the patient soon returns to its former debilitated *(cont'd p. 94)*

News In Brief

LATE CHURCH NEWS

CHURCH of England parishioners have asked senior members of the Church of England clergy to pretend they aren't gay, so as to give them a better understanding of heterosexuality.

"Even though many of the Clergy privately harbour feelings that heterosexuality is somehow perverse and unnatural," said Mrs E. Trubshaw of Hemel Hempstead, "by imagining themselves into our sensible shoes and unfashionable cardigans they can better understand this much misunderstood minority in the Church."

Despite the call, senior Church figures warned that the C of E was not yet ready to embrace practising heterosexuals into Church life.

SOHAM TRIAL VERDICT

IAN HUNTLEY and Maxine Carr were today sensationally found guilty of murder on the first day of their trial by the British tabloids.

"It only took us seconds to reach our unanimous decision," said one delighted Editor, "and we put really huge headlines and big pictures on the front *(cont. p. 94)*

IRAQ TROOP FORECAST

TONY BLAIR's envoy to Iraq, Sir Jeremy Greenstock, has admitted that British troops could still be there in 3005.

"While this is a little longer than we first envisaged, this new timeframe is a more realistic appraisal of when the full handover of the country to the Iraqi governing council can take place."

HIGH PRICE I PAID FOR 5-SECOND LOVE ROMP, ADMITS BORIS

By Our Broom Cupboard Staff TV's ***Charles Phwoar***

MOP-HAIRED Henley-on-Thames sex god Boris Johnson last night admitted that he had enjoyed a "moment of madness" in a London office broom cupboard with gorgeous, pouting, central European model, Miss (cont'd p. 94)

Did you have an affair with Princess Diana?

As hundreds of people suddenly remember their love romps with the late Queen of Hearts, you too can have a page in the newspaper telling us all the lurid details.

♥ ***Simply ring the hot-line and you will be held in a queue listening to the music of Bryan Adams until an operator can assist you.***

Ring now on 090909 785 36973

(calls charged at peak rate)

"I wouldn't get into bed for that kind of money"

the PREMIERSH*TS

IT'S BAD SHIT MAN!
PLAYERS ON COCAINE
I TOOK IT ONCE, REALLY FUCKED ME UP, THOUGHT I WAS A MODERN DAY STANLEY MATTHEWS
WELL THAT DOESN'T SOUND BAD
WHAT, YOU MUST BE JOKING...
WAGES £200 A WEEK

NO ONE is a bigger fan of Helen Fielding than yours truly. We go back a long way, Helie and me, to the days when we were both cub columnists for a certain newspaper (!) and we were always "borrowing ideas" from each other – well, she was, anyway!

One idea in particular I remember served Hels rather well in her career – but hey! that's what friends are for!

And of course I was the model for Pozza in the Bridget Jones film – the funny good-looking one with all the ideas, remember? – who Hugh Grant really fancied.

So, as one of her dearest friends, Hel won't mind me saying that her new book is absolute rubbish. As Bridget Jones might say, "It's v.v. bad!!!!"

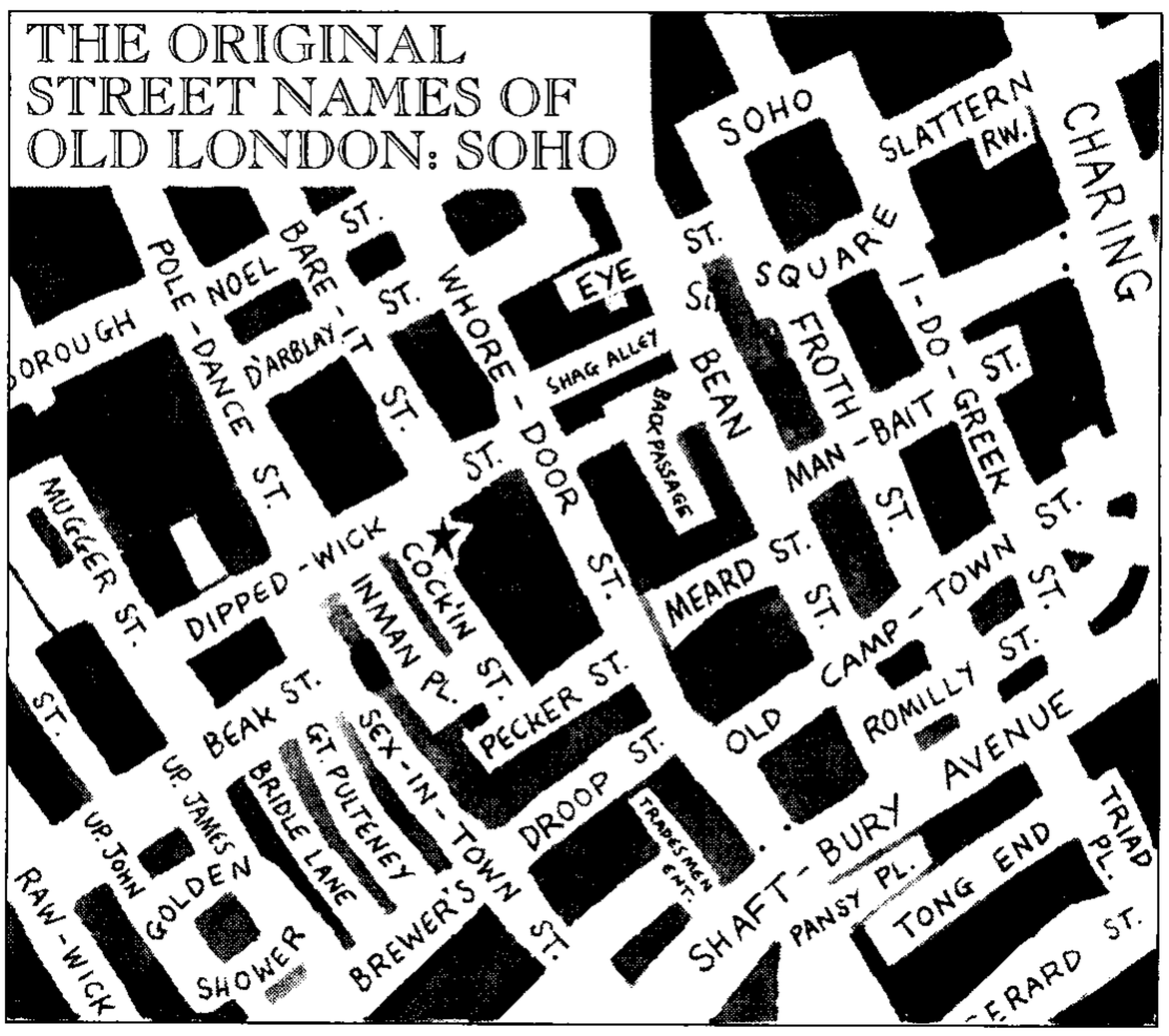
Jokes (0), Plot (0) and Character (0). Sorry, Hezzer, but, unlike Bridget Jones, this stuff is woefully thin!

I'T'LL PROBABLY sell millions of copies and my partner the useless Simon couldn't put it down (which makes a change from watching *The World's 100 Best Lager Ads* on Digital ITV3 with Paul Ross and A.A. Gill), but I think H. knows she should have done better.

Maybe now that she's finally found a partner (better late than never, eh, Hel?) and is about to pod, she'll realise that what women want to read is not silly stuff about spies but hilarious yet moving accounts of how a real woman tries to balance career and motherhood – something like, say, *Mummy For Old Rope* by a certain P. Filler (now in paperback at £7.99)!?!

Face facts – it's time to *grow up*, Helen, and acknowledge that, although you're much richer than me, I'm much better than you, and I always was – so there!

© *Polly Filler 2003.*



Daily Mail, Friday, November 14 2003

Exclusive To The Mail

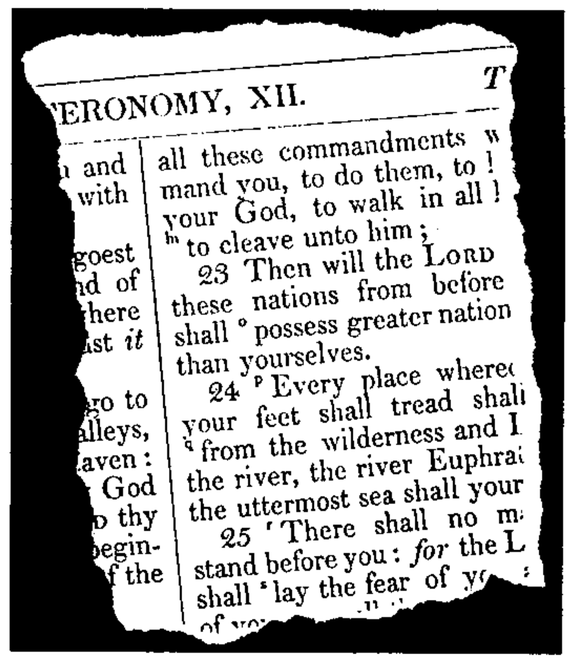
BIBLE CODE PREDICTS MAJOR DISASTER

by Our Mystic Staff **Paul Facre**

THE amazing Bible Code has eerily predicted many cataclysmic world events – the eruption of Vesuvius in 79AD, the Crusades in the Holy Land in the Thirteenth Century, the dropping of the Atom Bomb in 1945, the death of Princess Di in 1997 and the destruction of the Twin Towers in New York in 2001.

But now in the most chilling forecast yet, experts in the interpretation of the ancient secret code reveal the terrible news that house prices may fall in the first quarter of 2004.

The page of text opposite, taken from the Book of Deuteronomy,


ERONOMY, XII.

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your God, to walk in all l
to cleave unto him;
23 Then will the LORD
these nations from before
shall possess greater nation
than yourselves.
24 Every place where
your feet shall tread shall
from the wilderness and l
the river, the river Euphra
the uttermost sea shall your
25 There shall no m
stand before you: for the L
shall lay the fear of y

unveils the frightening prospect of the average three-bedroomed house in Purley losing up to 17% of its value due to rising interest rates.

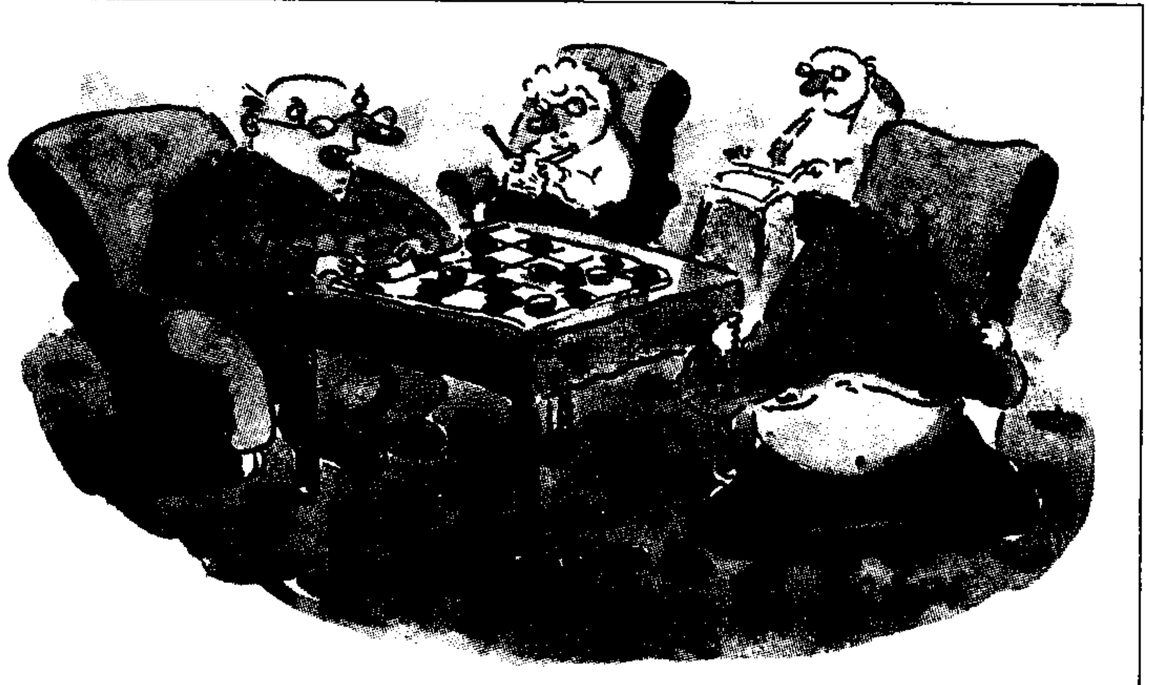
Tomorrow: *How Not Reading The Bible Code Gives You Cancer.*

NEWT MAN WREAKS HAVOC ON LONDON TRAFFIC AT COST OF BILLIONS

By Our Transport Staff
Jams Naughtie

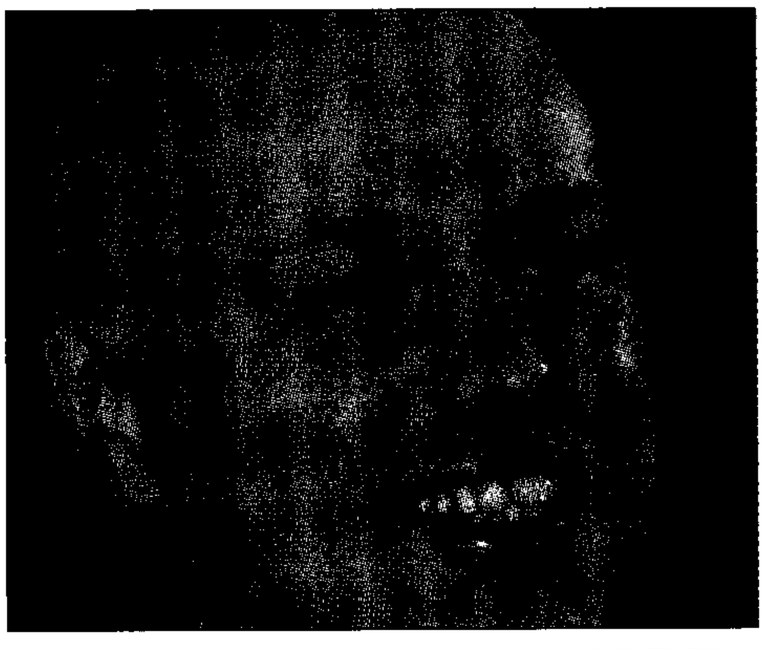
A 57-YEAR-OLD single-parent father, dressed as a newt, today climbed to the top of London's City Hall to make a series of ridiculous demands.

The entire population of London will have to pay a huge price for the chaos inflicted on the capital by the stunt that went too far. "When he first got up there," said one cab driver, "we all thought it was a bit of a laugh. But now we've seen the effect of it all, I am beginning to think that stringing up would be too *(cont'd p. 94)*



"Alright, alright – that's one all"

DIARY



IAIN DUNCAN SMITH

MONDAY

Onward and upward. That's my motto. Defeat? That's a four-letter word. And not one that crops up in my vocabulary.

If you are a General leading his troops into the trenches, you're not going to be deflected from victory just because a bombshell happens to have fallen on your head. Far from it. Okay, so your head has been sliced off. But you've still got two perfectly good legs. And let me add this. The British people have never set much store by heads. That is their inalienable right. And I don't intend to see it squandered.

This afternoon, I put through a call to Michael Howard. I bear him no rancour. Not a bit of it. I wish to offer him the benefit of my years in high office. And I hope to make it clear that I am available to put my experience at his service.

Michael is out. Busy man! Poor chap – I bet he now wishes he had a bit of my time for leisure activities! Of course he does.

At last, I can get on with the things that really matter. After all, I have my hobbies – what Denis Healey once called a winterland. This morning, I resume work on a long-standing project that has been sorely neglected these past two years. As every dedicated aero-modeller will be aware, the dogfight double – the Messerschmitt and Spitfire, accurately constructed and painstakingly painted in the correct Humbrol paint colours – is an ambitious project for anyone to take on. But it is a project I intend to see through.

TUESDAY

By lunchtime, I have finished laying the instructions out and have begun the onerous task of placing all the constituent parts – and there are well over 50 of them! – in the correct order for easy assembly. Once I get up a head of steam, I estimate this project will have been completed by the end of the week. Then, and only then, will I embark on the most almighty dog-fight! May the best man win! Though personally I'd back the British Spitfire against the Jerry Messerschmitt anytime! (Or is that what they call "politically correct"!!??!!) Onward and upward!

Michael H. has still not called back. I put another call through to his office, informing them I have mislaid his home number and could they let me have it? They tell me they can pass on any message. Before I call off, they ask me to remind them whether I spell my surname with a hyphen or without.

WEDNESDAY

Actually, solitaire is a very good game. Around mid-morning, the fuselage of the Messerschmitt began to get a bit fiddly, and I'd snapped one of the propellors in frustration, so I thought I'd take a breather. Betsy was having her hair done, and Michael still hadn't rung back (frankly he should get his staff in shape – if they can't pass on a simple message then how the bloody heck are they going to win an election?!!!) so I looked around for something to do. And there was the solitaire! The first game, I was left with eleven balls, the second game with thirteen, the third – owing to a technical setback – with seventeen. It's a record of consolidation and growth of which I am justly proud. My mission is to get down to one by Christmas. And I intend to do it my way. So much for the chattering classes! I'm happy to place my faith in the British people!

Just as I am embarking on a fourth game, my loyal old colleague Michael Ancram phones to see how I'm coping with what he calls my "new-found freedom". Good of him to call. Pick yourself a halfway decent ADC and he'll never let you down. I tell him of the strides I'm making with the Dogfight Double. He tells me that Central Office have been on at him about the return of my key, and how he looks forward to having a longer chat before too long.

THURSDAY

Typical instruction manual! They make it absolutely impossible to fit wings on each side of the Spitfire. So, after giving the matter much thought, I've settled, ingeniously, for fitting both wings to the same side, and doing the same for the Messerschmitt, so the impending dogfight will be fair.

I'm just playing around with the glue when Betsy puts her head around the door with a sympathetic smile and says that the first reviews of my novel have just come in. "Great! Onward and upward!" I say, "Let's see 'em!"

She says it'll save a lot of bother if she just reads out the best bits.

I'm all ears, but she's taking her time.

"Come on!" I say.

"I'm still looking," she says. Then at last she reads one out. "This one says there's no one like Duncan Smith for mixing his metaphors and the creation of two-dimensional characters," she says.

"High praise," I say, scraping some glue off my forehead. Onward and upward!

At long last, Michael Howard has rung back. Or at least a pleasant young lady his office. It's a courtesy call they're extending to all future Conservative backbenchers. They want the names and addresses of any wives and children, etc, so that Michael and Sandra can send us their seasonal greetings.

Before bed, I manage to squeeze a dozen games of solitaire into my hectic schedule. In the crucial game five, I have just nine balls left. A personal best – and one in the eye for the snobby metropolitan elite who despise the views and abilities of British people.

FRIDAY

This morning, I managed to keep a single Smartie going for three minutes forty seven seconds! We're frankly talking Guinness Book of Records material here!

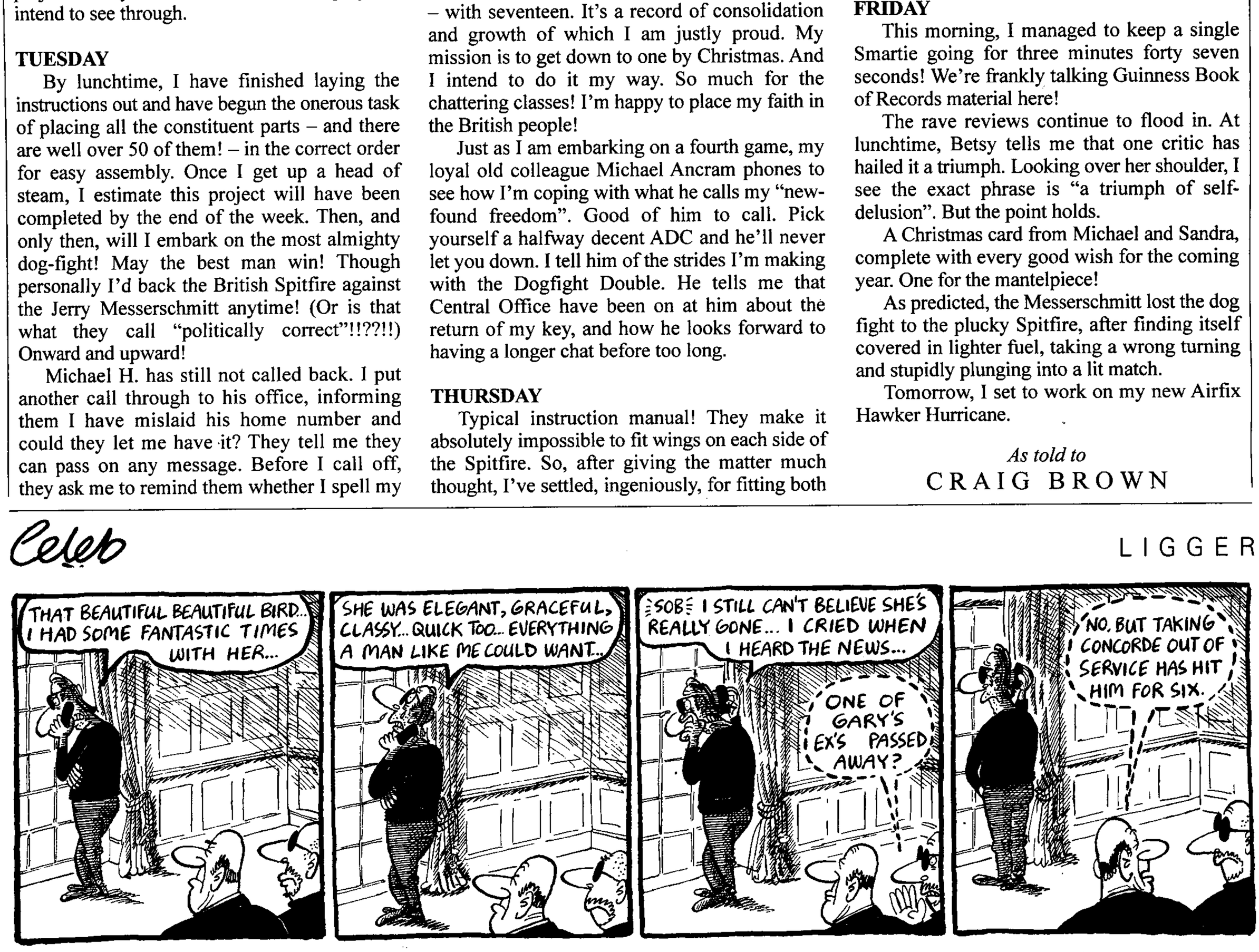
The rave reviews continue to flood in. At lunchtime, Betsy tells me that one critic has hailed it a triumph. Looking over her shoulder, I see the exact phrase is "a triumph of self-delusion". But the point holds.

A Christmas card from Michael and Sandra, complete with every good wish for the coming year. One for the mantelpiece!

As predicted, the Messerschmitt lost the dog fight to the plucky Spitfire, after finding itself covered in lighter fuel, taking a wrong turning and stupidly plunging into a lit match.

Tomorrow, I set to work on my new Airfix Hawker Hurricane.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN


THAT BEAUTIFUL BEAUTIFUL BIRD... I HAD SOME FANTASTIC TIMES WITH HER...
SHE WAS ELEGANT, GRACEFUL, CLASSY... QUICK TOO... EVERYTHING A MAN LIKE ME COULD WANT...
SOB I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE SHE'S REALLY GONE... I CRIED WHEN I HEARD THE NEWS...
ONE OF GARY'S EX'S PASSED AWAY?
NO. BUT TAKING CONCORDE OUT OF SERVICE HAS HIT HIM FOR SIX.

Literary Review

Name and shame

Mortification: Writers' Stories of their Public Shame

Robin Robertson

(Fourth Estate, £16.99)

HERE we are in mid-November, with the bookshop tables groaning beneath the weight of big, august autumn books, and what is the main literary talking point? The answer, mysteriously enough, is a dinky little volume on the highly serious subject of, er, *writers' public shame*.

Edited by hot-shot Cape editor Robin Robertson, midwife to the late-90s Scottish literary renaissance, *Mortification* is, if nothing else, a testimony to the lustre of its compiler's address book. Heavy duty contributors abound (the Margarets Atwood and Drabble, Louis de Bernieres, several other "A" list trusties) and yet Robertson's briefing note to his accomplices looks to have been sadly imprecise.

The implication is that the book world's finest will be dilating on their professional mishaps, yet Karl Miller uses the outing as an excuse to analyse an episode from the far-off days of his National Service, while the ever-larksome Irvine Welsh has a darling story about washing his arse in a public urinal in front of some amused football fans.

All this, though, has the charm of novelty when set against the reports from the coal-face. The things us writers have to put up with! No one turns up to hear us read (practically everyone on display)! They put us in radio studios where we can eavesdrop on presenters wondering who we are (Maggie O'Farrell)! They don't give us enough to eat or drink (Deborah Moggach)! Our distinguished co-performers bunk off early to watch *Sopranos* on TV (Claire Messud)! Our teeth fall out impacted in pregig toffee (Matthew Sweeney)! Bless, bless, bless!

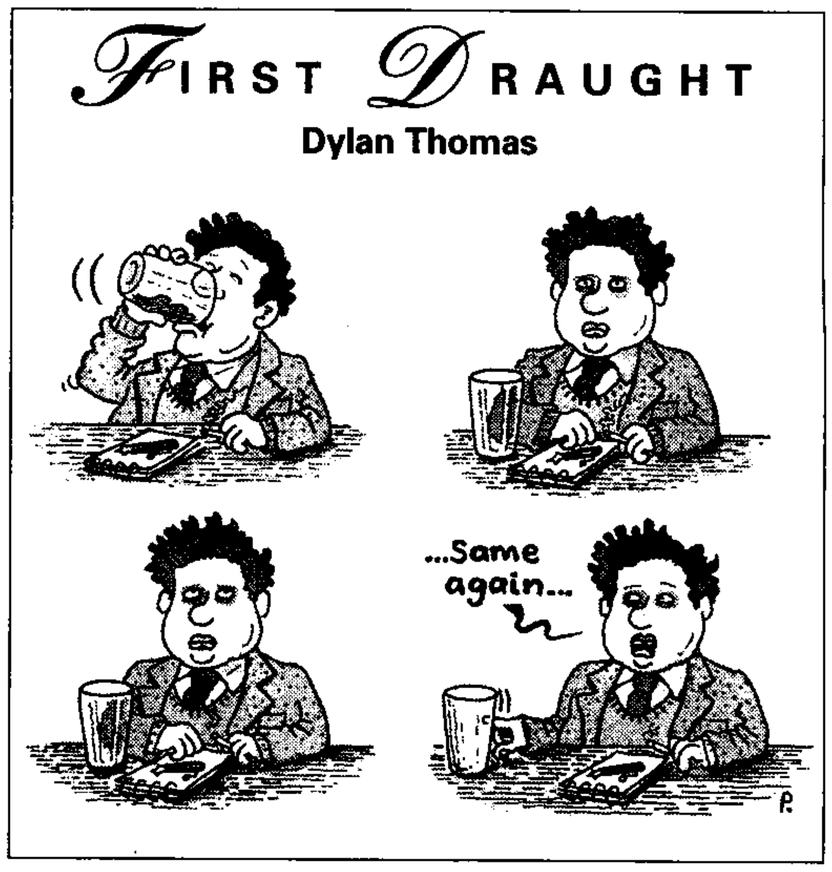
The problem in exercises of this sort, alas, is that for all the intimations of *hubris* no one is really being humiliated in the slightest. In fact an air of quiet self-congratulation infuses the air like hickory smoke, and plainly a bigger collection of literary luvvies never existed.

James Wood's sober confession of how he was taken to task for mistakenly switching Lady Catherine de Bourgh from *Pride and Prejudice* to *Mansfield Park* is a particularly delicious example of the genre. "One of Lichtenberg's aphorisms goes: 'an erratum on the list of errata'" our man brainily begins. Wood's own epigrams, it turns out, are quite as sonorous. "To publicize error is to multiply it indefinitely" apparently. Then again, "memory is organic". Hang on a sec, though. A bit later Wood decides that "Memory is vanity." *Und so weiter*, as Goethe or somebody may have said.

Oh well. Michael Holroyd lectures scornfully to a clump of Russian literary apparatchiks and forgets that irony doesn't translate. William Boyd, on tour in America, has to answer endless questions about the royal family. A single shaft of light relief — ironic light relief for it unintentionally subverts all that has gone before — is provided by Michael Bracewell's account of how he interviewed The Fall's Mark E. Smith at the ICA. Smith's first act, on arriving backstage, is to demand a bucket, in which he proceeds to urinate. "Were you always interested in music?" Bracewell wonders desperately. "My uncle played the saw. Lovely instrument" Smith dead-pans back.

If ever there were a missed opportunity in modern British publishing, *Mortification* is it. Never mind disrespectful punters or one-man signing queues, think of the genuine humiliations inflicted on people a few rungs down the ladder from this collection of prize-winner and best-sellers: the eternal publishing house "rationalisations" that see middle-aged novelists thrown into the street because their books only sell 3,000 copies a time; the symbolic figure of Claire Morrall whose Booker-shortlisted *Astonishing Splashes of Colour* was turned down by 30 publishers, largely, one gathers, because its fiftysomething school-teaching author didn't look like Monica Ali.

Sadly these are not, by and large, topics that Mr Robinson's darling crew feel like covering. Reaching the end I looked anxiously for that mitigating, charitable gloss, the end note announcing that all royalties would be donated to the Distressed Scriveners' Fund or the Society of Authors' Retirement Home. Alas, I never found it. Amazing to relate, somebody got paid for this.



BOOKS & BOOKMAN

■ PAN Macmillan's new catalogue makes interesting reading. The blurb for the second volume of Lord Archole's *Prison Diary* explains that he was "sentenced to four years in prison for pergatory [sic]".

"Purgatory" might well be the book's subtitle, but the former top Tory's actual offence was perjury. Either proof-reading at Pan Macmillan is on the slide or someone there is making a wry comment on how it feels to read one of his lordship's books.

■ REVIEWS of *A Royal Duty* by Paul Burrell were divided, to say the least.

In the *Mail on Sunday* Craig Brown said it was "surprisingly untrashy", while Andrew Roberts told *Sunday Telegraph* readers the book was a "toe-curling" betrayal, not to mention a "coagulation of luvviedom, mangled syntax, gloop and multi-cliché".

The oddest of the reviews came from Christopher "the Spiv" Silvester in the *Sunset Times*, who referred to "Burrell's decency" (which Spiv admitted might well be "a cunning mask of dissimulation"), and concluded that "judged simply as a royal memoir, *A Royal Duty* is a classy production".

Whatever the critics say, the big question remains: will Penguin ever get back the £2m it reputedly paid for world rights? Amazingly, the answer is probably yes. A sizeable tranche of the advance will have been earned from the *Mirror* serialisation, which doesn't seem to have harmed hardback sales. The real money will come in when the mass-market paperback comes out. And there's the American market too.

Of course if Penguin does earn out, it will simply be more ammunition for those who believe the way forward for publishing is to spend shedloads on ghost-written celebrity tosh rather than using the money to buy in a number of real writers.

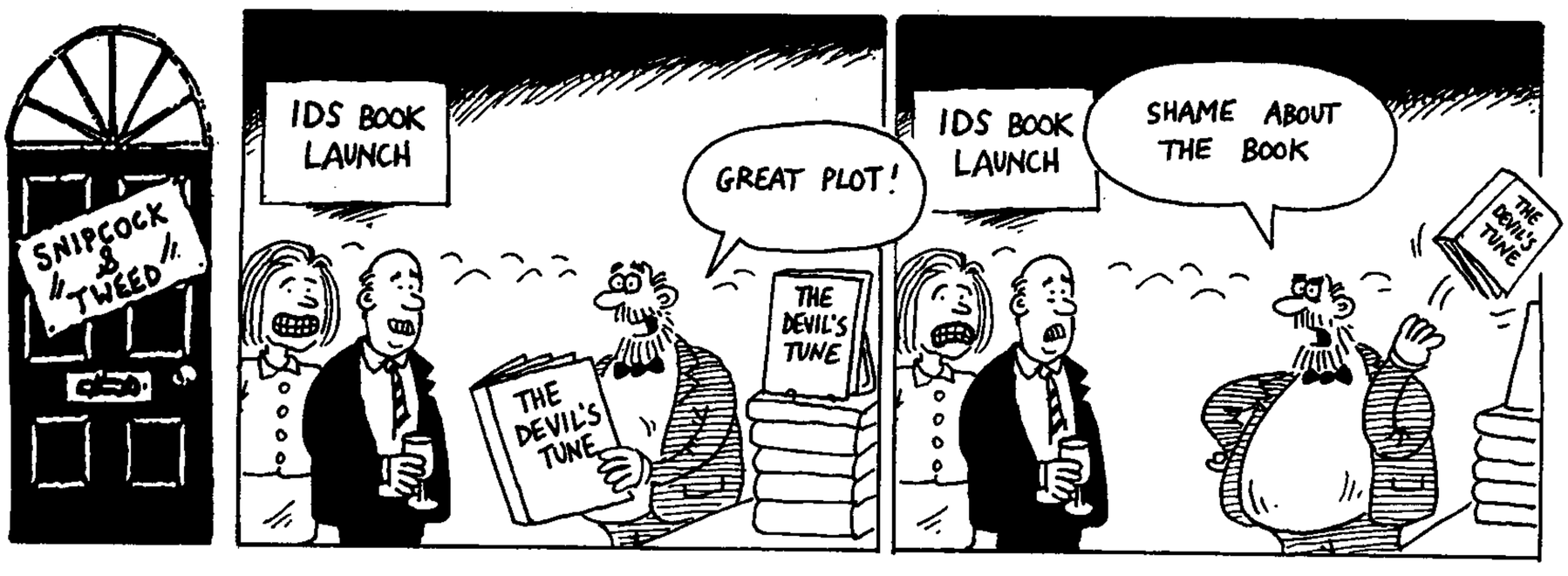
■ THE Nibbies awards are indeed to be televised – but not on Channel 5 as we suggested in Eye 1091.

Instead, highlights from the two-tier bunfight will be networked by that well-known literary discussion programme, *Richard and Judy*, on Channel 4. Are the former *This Morning* presenters hoping to set up the British equivalent of the Oprah Book Club? Stranger things have happened...

■ THE back cover of comedian Richard Herring's book on the life and times of the penis, *Talking Cock*, carries a laudatory quote from the *Observer*.

"Richard Herring's male answer to the *Vagina Monologues* is in fact an impassioned and thoughtful disquisition on masculinity, cultural identity and sexual anthropology. But don't let that put you off; there are still lots of jokes about porridge guns and weeing," wrote Stephanie Merritt, the paper's deputy lit ed and comedy reviewer.

By an amazing coincidence, Merritt happens to be the girlfriend of one Richard Herring and, with her son Paddy, is one of the dedicatees of the book.



■ "TONY MARTIN the Charmer" oozed the *Mail on Sunday*'s headline over a story about how the freed Norfolk burglar-blaster had a big day out in the West End with Lord Archole's former shaggee Sally Farmiloe. Martin and Farmiloe – a dead ringer for *Ab Fab*'s Patsy – took in shopping at Selfridges and Hamleys, followed by tea at the Ritz.

"He is very attractive," said Farmiloe. "He was very flirty and it was rather nice really." Farmiloe's improbable date with Martin was arranged as a publicity

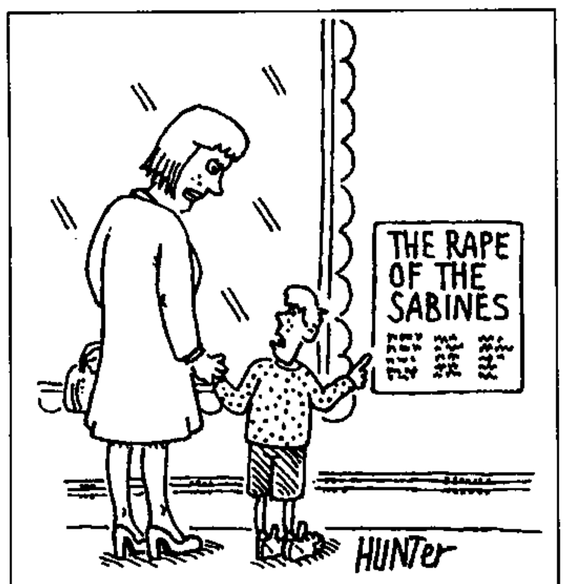
stunt by Bulgarian "countess" Valentina Artsrunik, who happens to be the prospective publisher of works by both of them. The "countess" came along too, and also paid tribute to Martin's compelling charms: "He is a very sophisticated man, very charming. He makes comments with a vague sexual connotation but in a nice way – not coarse or crude."

Valentina told the *MoS* how they had spent hours at Hamleys looking at teddy bears. Martin tossed a kumquat across Selfridges to attract someone's attention then, according to Valentina: "Tony looked at me and said 'Aren't I a good shot?' He has a tremendous sense of humour!" Indeed.

After a little difficulty over the title of Martin's memoir – *Tony Martin, My Right to Kill* was thought a bit strong so it has been changed to *A Right to Kill?* – the trigger-happy farmer's book project is back on. If all goes well it will be published next year, "edited" by the countess's fourth husband, the former armed robber John McVicar.

Also eagerly awaited from Valentina's publishing company Artnik is *Murder in Virginia*, her own account of a little brush with the law in the United States. Valentina and her then-boyfriend Dorian Lester were charged in 1998 with the murder of George Moody, a jeweller in Charlottesville, Virginia. Valentina Djelebova (as she called herself at the time) was acquitted, but Lester got life. Djelebova did, however, receive a 30-day suspended sentence for illegal possession of a handgun plus another short term for being "an accessory after the fact".

According to Charlottesville's *Daily Progress* newspaper: "Police nabbed Djelebova and Dorian Gill Lester inside a pawn shop on the Downtown Mall four days after Moody's body was found. Police said they discovered in the couple's possession hundreds of precious and semi-precious stones traced to the workshop area of Moody's home, where he ran a jewelry business. Like Lester, Djelebova had a ticket to fly to London's Heathrow Airport with departure scheduled for the day of her detention."



"Mum – what's a Sabine?"

Released on bail to look after her children in London, Djelebova – who has also used the names "Armstrong", "De Jelebov" and "Joulebine" – never returned to the US.

Commonwealth of Virginia attorney Dave Chapman, who prosecuted the case, for some reason burst out laughing when the *Eye* told him that the "countess" was now purporting to be a serious publisher in London and something of a darling of the gossip columns. When he stopped laughing he said: "This woman is not welcome in the United States." How very churlish!

'Bookworm'

JUST FANCY THAT!

Private Lynch, who is still recuperating from wounds sustained during her ordeal and who reportedly has no memory of the incident, recently signed a $1m book deal to publish an account of her capture.

— Item on the BBC website.

WHAT YOU MISSED
Hurd But Not Seen

MANY *Eye* readers will be wondering what elder statesman Douglas Hurd has to say in his autobiography *Memoirs* (Little, Brown, £20) about the notorious financial deal which he and his old foreign office chum Dame Pauline Neville-Jones signed with Slobodan Milosevic in Belgrade, shortly after they had left Whitehall to work for NatWest Markets.

Many questions were raised about the propriety of doing business with the Butcher of Belgrade, especially since it was made possible by the lifting of sanctions against Serbia, which in turn was largely thanks to the lobbying of the official British representative at the Dayton peace talks, one Pauline Neville-Jones – who promptly moved into the private sector with Hurd to exploit the new opening for commercial gain.

For years Hurd has complained that his partnership with Milosevic was misunderstood or misrepresented. Where better to set the record straight than in a lengthy autobiography?

But readers will have to look hard to find any mention of it at all. His only comment runs to just one sentence, on page 475: "This was a legal and legitimate deal, but the visit [a celebratory breakfast with Milosevic in Belgrade] was a mistake, not interesting enough to justify the embarrassment it later caused."

And, er, that's it. It seems that the scandalous saga is also "not interesting enough" to justify further explanation.

Hurd does find space, however, to devote the best part of two pages to an attack on *Private Eye* over the long-running story of British nurse Helen Smith, who was found dead at the bottom of a block of flats in Saudi Arabia where she had been attending a party.

Her father Ron Smith, a former policeman in Yorkshire, supported by the *Eye*, waged a long battle to find out how Helen died. He eventually overturned the official decision not to hold an inquest, and a much-publicised hearing under the then Leeds coroner Philip Gill returned an open verdict.

Hurd, then a minister of state at the foreign office, denounces the *Eye* for "emitting volumes of poisonous smoke" on the issue. The following facts have been left out of Hurd's account, no doubt inadvertently...

No one yet knows how Helen died. The foreign office and its officials in Saudi Arabia claimed from the moment of her death that she had fallen off a balcony in an upstairs flat.

The Leeds inquest established that the injuries to Helen's body (most of which had been kept secret until then) strongly suggested that she had been raped and killed by a savage blow to her head. The injuries did not suggest that she had fallen from the flat.

The inquest would never have happened but for Ron Smith's long battle supported by the *Eye*.

The foreign office sent two lawyers, including Andrew Collins, now a high court judge, to the inquest. They argued for a verdict of accidental death, which the jury rejected.

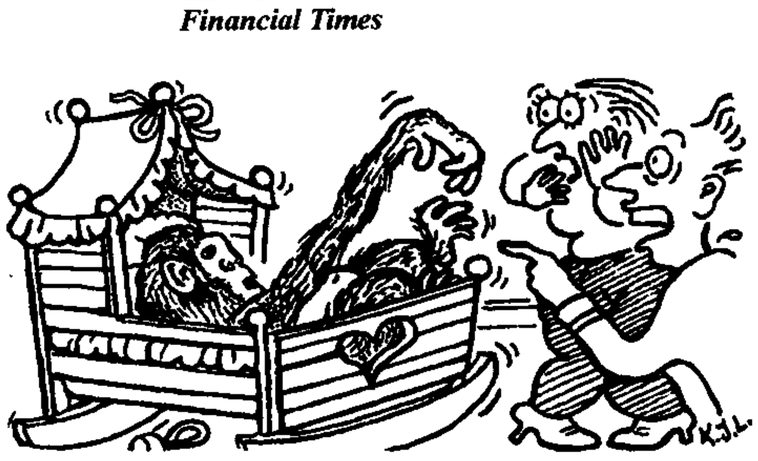
PS: Reviewing Hurd's autobiography for the *Guardian*, former Tory minister John Nott included a glowing tribute to Hurd's wife. But, much to his annoyance, the *Grauniad* cut it out.

"That bit *must* go in," he wailed. Why so? "Because when Douglas reviewed my memoirs in the *Guardian* last year he included a glowing tribute to *my* wife."

Pseuds Corner

And my imperative within our bar and restaurant is to break away from the traditional psychology of an a la carte set-up to allow my food to be as accessible as possible, to empower the customer to choose what they want to eat and how. This is perhaps the essential and unresolved dilemma of being a chef... What I have learnt... is that past the recipe stage our work becomes almost architectural.

Chef CHRISTINE MANSFIELD
Financial Times



KEAYS Theodore John Briffa, October 2nd. Another naked apelet, sibling to Chunkfish and Mudslug and son to bemused parents. Hail.
***Guardian* birth announcements**

Whoever has not seen the very line of Helene Cixous's handwriting will miss something essential of what communicates to the body of the published text this inspired life and animality, this supple manualness of the quill, the patient acceleration of the letter, fine, lively, agile, sure, economical, clear, readable, carried off in an uninterrupted and unimaginably curious cursivity, which is to say concerned with finding quickly, with not losing an instant and not letting itself be outpaced by what it finds itself finding before even having searched for it, even if we know it has been searching for centuries and has always known where it searched for what it has found in the right place at the angle of a certain branch. Her writing reminds me of all the squirrels in the world.

JACQUES DERRIDA, quoted in flyer advertising 'A Conference with Helene Cixous', University College London

When you drink a double espresso, you are saying, I am really hard – I have a mind like a mantrap – and am really dirty in bed. I shall definitely not be awaiting your phone call.

ZOE WILLIAMS
Vogue

If every face tells a story, Sean Penn's could be the Great American novel.

RICHARD CORLISS
Time Magazine

Breda Beban: 'Touchdown' shows five women wanking themselves to orgasm. The composition of the shots – fixed on the faces, wiggling shoulders and hair spread out over a white pillow – emphasises that, absolutely alone, the women have found their centre.
***Time Out* listings**

Pseuds Corporate

The analysis of the Staff Perceptions indicated that a broadly supported staff aspiration was for greater clarity and consistency in communication at Mayfield.

As one part of moving this agenda on, the Senior Leadership Team produced a briefing paper in respect of out-going correspondence. I picked another strand in briefing when I outlined how we might move toward greater clarity and consistency in respect of in-coming school correspondence while minimising work load for colleagues but still securing our sought after 'vertical' and 'lateral' communication and consultation [continues]

JOHN ADAM, Headmaster, Mayfield School, Portsmouth, in letter to staff.

CONTRIBUTORS: Yehuda Shapiro, Marc Goodwin, Adrian North, Ben Lovegrove, Robert Low, T. Bolton, Anon.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

LANDER AHOY!

PUBLICITY over the recent department of trade report on TransTec plc concentrated on the role in the ignominious collapse of the company's former chairman and chief executive, "new" Labour's first paymaster-general, Geoffrey Robinson *[above]*. This was a rich seam for the inquiry, incorporating the celebrated crook (and former target for DTI inspectors) Robert Maxwell, and the time-honoured British entrepreneurial custom of ripping off government grants to Northern Ireland.

But less notice was taken of the swingeing attack made by the inspectors on the company's auditor, the country's biggest accountant, PwC. The criticism went back to 1993 when the accountant in charge of the TransTec audit was Jonathan Lander, then of Coopers & Lybrand.

TransTec's profits for the year were "overstated" by £610,000. When the board eventually heard about this, the accounts were adjusted. But one director, Rhys Williams, rang Mr Lander to find out why the auditors had not exposed the overstatement in the first place. The report reveals: "According to Mr Williams, Mr Lander replied that management had made clear to the auditors that they would lose the audit had they done so. Mr Williams told us that he regarded that as 'utterly unprofessional' coming from a partner in Coopers & Lybrand."

Utterly unprofessional it may have been, but his behaviour in 1993 did not stop Mr Lander from continuing to audit TransTec accounts when Coopers & Lybrand became part of PwC in 1998 – in time for the real auditing scandal at TransTec, which takes up most of the DTI report. At the root of this scandal was an accounting trick whereby millions of pounds owed by TransTec to the Ford motor company were attributed in the accounts to "tooling" and so could be "capitalised" and did not have to be set against profits.

This unique and fallacious device was approved by PwC even though the auditors had not seen or heard a single word from Ford to justify the alleged "tooling". Challenged, the auditors claimed that the device had been accepted by the company's board when it hadn't been. The result, concluded the inspectors, "provides an example of auditors who lacked scepticism and who were willing to accept the representations of TransTec's management and who put these representations to directors without getting to the facts". As usual, the accountants blandly refused to repent or apologise. The inspectors concluded: "In thus seeking to deny their own responsibility, in our view the auditors displayed (and continue to display) a regrettable lack of principle."

The report is being studied by the accountants' Joint Disciplinary Scheme, and PwC partners are likely to find themselves charged with various offences. The report is even more certain to lead to expensive litigation against PwC by others of the Big Four accountants representing receivers and creditors of TransTec. Nothing new there: the Big Four accountants are engaged in almost permanent negligence actions against each other.

PS: The DTI inspectors' denunciation of PwC for "lack of principle" coincides neatly with PwC's proud sponsorship of "Building Trust awards", in which companies are publicly commended for "telling it like it is". The list of award-winning companies includes some of the biggest names in British business (Geest, Shell, BP, etc) but for some reason not TransTec.

PPS: In its hour of public disgrace, PwC welcomes a new influential figure: Malcolm Rifkind, former Tory foreign secretary, who will advise the firm on PPP programmes.

Porter's Dodge

THOSE hoping that the freezing of up to £30m of Dame Shirley Porter's assets means that she will one day be forced to pay the £37m surcharge she owes for having gerrymandered Westminster council whilst she was its leader in 1986 may be celebrating too soon. Questions that still need answering are: how much of the frozen £30m will actually be recovered? And what happened to her other £40m, which itself could be an underestimate of Lady Tesco's fortune?

The methodical approach employed by law firm Stephenson Harwood, who have been employed by Westminster council to uncover her wealth, gave Porter plenty of time to squirrel her money away and to organise, with the help of others, several blind alleys down which investigators could waste their time. The claims on the Guernsey money, which Porter can be guaranteed to vigorously contest, will be relatively easy to secure given the disclosure agreement between the UK and Guernsey. Tracing the rest of Dame Shirley's money and actually getting one's hands on it are, though, two entirely different things, especially when it comes to countries such as Bermuda or the Cayman Islands. Guernsey itself is no beacon of propriety and transparency, but much of Porter's money is tied up in countries where disclosure agreements are not worth the paper they are written on. Although the money identified in Guernsey is real enough, whether it will cover the eventual costs of employing solicitors Stephenson Harwood is another matter. Last week [Wed 5th] Westminster council agreed to set aside a further £500,000 towards the legal cost of pursuing Dame Shirley. Given the enormity of the task, this is a very modest sum indeed.

One avenue that demands far more attention than it has received to date is the role played by Porter's son John and his associates in disposing of her assets in a such manner that they may prove impossible to recover. Among those closest to John Porter is a colourful American entrepreneur, Oliver Grace Jnr *(See Eyes passim)*.

Despite last week's news that parts of Dame Shirley's fortune have been identified and frozen, the feeling that law firm Stephenson Harwood has been slow on the uptake remains. The firm, which is instructed by Westminster council to find Dame Shirley's money, also acted on behalf of her son's mate Grace, as revealed in the last *Eye*, to purchase shares in Redbus, an internet company run by John Porter. Earlier this year Stephenson Harwood was given a letter written by John Porter on behalf of Whitecoast Investments to a company in the US, promising funding and requesting a directorship for his mother in return. Let us hope the investigators get round to asking Porter what this was all about.

JUST FANCY THAT

■ **IN JANUARY this year businessman John Porter sent his mother, Dame Shirley Porter, a large bunch of flowers to thank her for organising a surprise birthday party for him. Touched by her son's consideration, but unsure whether he had feigned surprise, she thanked him for the flowers and wrote: "You appeared to be totally surprised – unless, of course, you have inherited my genes and know how to lie."**

Bermuda shorts

HOW IS Mapeley, the group of companies that bought almost all the tax and customs offices in the UK through a subsidiary in a tax haven, coming along? Not very well, according to the latest accounts, just posted.

Mapeley Ltd has net liabilities of £14m and is technically insolvent. It manages to survive as a "going concern" through promises from Mapeley UK Co Ltd, which despite its Britannic-sounding name is registered in Bermuda, a tax haven, and therefore doesn't have to disclose its accounts.

Mapeley Steps Contractor is even deeper in the mire. It has net liabilities of £29m and £30m in bank borrowings guaranteed by Mapeley Steps Ltd, which is also registered in Bermuda, and therefore doesn't have to disclose its accounts.

So the whole rickety Mapeley edifice is only being kept going by shortlived promises from shadowy companies in tax havens. There is no sign of any further business or any other major contract for the Mapeley group, and there seem to be only two possible remedies. Either its directors persuade the British government to part with much more money from the British taxpayer – interminable negotiations on this matter are still going on. Or the Mapeley companies go bust, and Britain's tax and customs offices are taken over by their bankers.

Meanwhile the government finally responded last month to some of the stinging criticisms about the Mapeley fiasco from the House of Commons treasury select committee. *Eye* readers will recall the solemn assurances of Inland Revenue chairman Sir Nicholas Montagu that there was no option but to sell the tax offices to a company in a tax haven. EU procurement rules, claimed Sir Nicholas, obliged government departments to let contracts to the lowest bidder, even if that bidder is based in a tax haven.

The government now finally and unequivocally asserts that this claim is absolute rubbish. Indeed, the government now recommends that all its departments include a "model contract condition" in all its contracts with buyers of its property specifically banning the use of tax havens by the purchasing company. Sir Nicholas's assurances to parliament, in other words, were so much trash.

Any senior official of any principle whose testimony to parliament is so blatantly and cruelly snubbed by his own government or employer might normally feel it his duty to resign.

The shadow of Seroxat

THE awful case of Christopher Francis, the young golf champion who bludgeoned and stabbed his grandmother and his aunt to death in their Hampshire home, was reported in the *Daily Telegraph* on 6 October.

The young man had stood trial for murder at Winchester crown court, where the prosecution accepted his plea of diminished responsibility. He was convicted of manslaughter and is locked up indefinitely in Broadmoor.

The report revealed that Mr Francis was being "treated with anti-depressants" at the time of the killings. But no mention was made of the specific anti-depressant – the controversial drug, Seroxat.

Seroxat and its side-effects were investigated in two recent *Panorama* programmes and several articles in the *Guardian* by Sarah Boseley. They prompted a flood of complaints from people who had suffered or witnessed the often horrific side effects of the drug, which include suicide.

Official complaints about the drug, which was withdrawn from use by under-18s in Britain earlier this year, outnumber complaints for the next 20 drugs on the government's complaints list. One result of the programme and the campaigns is that the manufacturer GlaxoSmithKline, one of the biggest companies in the world, agreed to remove from its literature the claim that Seroxat is not addictive.

This could have been relevant to the sad case of Francis, who had been on Seroxat for some years and had attempted suicide while on a university course, but insisted on continuing with the drug.

GAMES FOR A LAUGH Pt. 1

THE waddling, bow-tied chess impresario Raymond Keene has long been known as "the Penguin" because of his uncanny resemblance to Batman's arch-enemy. How fitting, then, that the latest staging post in his quest for world domination should be Gotham City itself.

A press release issued on 27 October by the Madison Avenue-based RTG Ventures Inc – "the interactive gaming company focused on the Far East" – announced that it had hired the Penguin as a consultant. "Mr Keene is the chess correspondent for the London *Times* and *International Herald Tribune* newspapers," it added with pride. "He is widely regarded as the world's leading expert on chess and mind games."

But then RTG is partly owned by a firm called Brain Games Asia, which in turn is partly owned by Keene, so RTG's praise of his expertise presumably comes straight from the Penguin's mouth.

According to a document filed with the securities and exchange commission in Washington, in May this year RTG Ventures Inc "entered into an agreement for the exchange of common stock with MJWC, a British Virgin Islands corporation, the result of which MJWC became our wholly-owned subsidiary. On the same day, we entered into an asset transfer agreement with Brain Games Asia Inc., a British Virgin Islands corporation, in which we acquired all of the assets of Brain Games Asia Inc… As a result of this transaction, the shareholders of Brain Games Asia Inc. and MJWC control approximately 84 percent of the issued and outstanding shares of the company's common stock."

Does this modus operandi sound familiar? Regular *Eye* readers may recall that in the spring of 2000, Keene and his Mayfair business partner Alan Lubin acquired 88 percent of the shares in Brain Games Network plc (BGN) for a song, while flogging the remaining 12 percent to a group of hapless investors for £3m. The scheme involved Keene and Lubin "selling" three worthless companies to BGN, one of which they claimed to be "a valuable asset".

It is now four months since BGN went into liquidation; Einstein Group plc, the company to which BGN sold off its chess "assets", has since gone into administration. Yet already history appears to be repeating itself. With a quick swap of paper Brain Games Asia, largely owned and controlled by Lubin (through his Swiss company Giloberg Finance Ltd) and by Keene, has acquired a large slice of RTG Ventures Inc. True, 84 percent is not quite 88 percent, but let's not be too greedy this time.

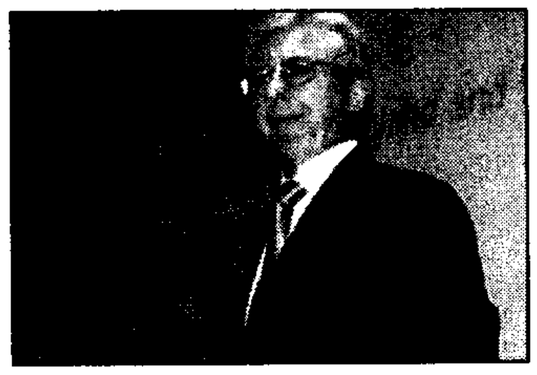
Why would a New York corporation want to own MJWC and Brain Games Asia? The SEC document gives RTG's explanation: "MJWC has a contract with the Chinese sports ministry to organise and promote the world Chinese Poker Championships until 2009. MJWC owns all the multimedia and internet rights to the championships and the events leading up to it. MJWC also has contracts to organise and promote the world Mah Jong Championship until the games 2009."

These claims are somewhat puzzling to those in the world of Mind Sports, given that the World Mah Jong championships take place in Japan and not China. And as for Chinese Poker, what world championships? Google knows of none, nor do any of the Mind Sports experts contacted by the *Eye*. Furthermore, the SEC document shows MJWC's turnover in the year to April 2003 as being $500, which makes it all the more remarkable that the company could acquire such assets, even if they existed in China. It also claims that "because of these contracts MJWC has access to a database containing in excess of 30 million online players of the above games". Really?

In the case of Brain Games Asia, RTG describes its sole asset as "the rights to organise and promote the Chinese Chess championships". But wait a minute — did BGN not announce at its AGM in December 2001 that Brain Games Asia owned "the worldwide multimedia rights to the Beijing Opera"? What has happened to that particular asset? Did it ever exist?

Other recent announcements from RTG may provoke *déjà vu* in anyone who remembers the Brain Games disaster. The company's chief financial officer is named as Barrington Fludgate, who is also CEO of Xborder Corporate Services Inc. A quick glance at Xborder's website reveals that another of its senior executives is David Massey – who was the CEO of Brain Games Network from spring 2001 until this summer, when the company went into liquidation.

What does all this mean? Could the recent flurry of press releases from RTG Ventures Inc be part of an attempt to create public interest in the company and thus lure punters to buy the remaining 16 percent of its shares for millions of dollars? Anyone planning to back the Penguin's latest adventure would do well to conduct a little due diligence before parting with their money.



Lord Brennan QC

Compensation vulture

WHEN Lord (Derry) Irvine had to find a successor to David Calcutt as assessor of compensation in wrongful conviction cases, by far the best qualified and well-connected candidate was his fellow peer Lord (Daniel) Brennan QC, a deputy high court judge.

Lord Brennan (ennobled by the Blair government in 2000) is now a commanding figure at Matrix Chambers, whose most famous barrister is the prime minister's wife, and Derry's former pupil, Cherie Booth QC.

One of Brennan's first jobs was to fix the compensation for the 18-year imprisonment of Michael and Vincent Hickey after they were wrongly convicted in 1979 of the murder of the newspaper boy Carl Bridgewater. While calculating the amount that should be paid to the Hickeys, Lord Brennan came up with the novel idea that about £60,000 should be deducted in each case for something called "saved living expenses". This was the estimated cost of board and lodging which, the noble Lord argued, was "saved" by the Hickeys while they were in prison.

Astonished, the Hickeys' lawyers took the case to judicial review under a high court judge, Mr Justice Maurice Kay. He held that such charges could not be deducted. That seemed the end of the matter… but not so. Now Lord Brennan has decided to take his novel theory to the court of appeal. If he loses there, the costs of the appeal will have to be met by the treasury solicitor's office (aka the taxpayer).

GOOD NEWS SPECIAL

Penguin flap

THE Falklands Islands government has been slapped on the wrist by a judge for trying to oust a penguin expert who revealed that 100,000 birds had been killed by overfishing last year.

Chief justice James Wood ruled that the Falkland Islands government (FIG) had acted unlawfully in rejecting Mike Bingham's application for islander status and a work permit. Falklands newspaper *Penguin News* reports that he told a court that it was unconstitutional and inappropriate to reject an application because of someone's lawfully held and expressed views. FIG's official reasons for refusing to renew the work permit were revealed in *Eye* 1079: "He sought to discredit and bring into disrepute the state of the Falkland Islands environment and the role of the government in its protection."

After the deaths of around 100,000 birds last May, Mr Bingham, an independent researcher who has published work in several peer-reviewed penguin journals, told the BBC that the penguins had undoubtedly died of starvation. The government of the extremely fishing-dependent islands said more research was needed.

Chief justice Wood said: "One of the problems with democracy is that the government has to put up with opposition whether it likes it or doesn't like it."

Mr Bingham's application will now be referred back to the islands' executive council and governor to be reconsidered.

FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS...

■ **DO NOT RESUSCITATE:** Bunny Pinnington, the Swansea nurse sacked six years ago after blowing the whistle on a "do not resuscitate" policy at a special school, has won another chance to prove that her dismissal was unlawful.

A hearing in London last month cleared the way for her to challenge an employment tribunal decision last April that she had been correctly dismissed because of poor health and poor attendance. It was the second time the Cardiff employment tribunal's handling of the case had been found flawed.

Mrs Pinnington was initially suspended for breach of confidentiality and later dismissed by Swansea council after she alerted the family of a little girl with a rare degenerative brain condition, that teaching staff at her special school had directed that she should *not* be resuscitated should she collapse. The family of Anne-Marie Davies, then aged four, was appalled and withdrew Anne-Marie, now aged 10, from the school.

After two internal inquiries by the local education authority and the school's governing body effectively cleared the school of wrongdoing, and Mrs Pinnington had her industrial tribunal thrown out on a bizarre timing technicality, she complained to Alun Michael, then secretary of state for Wales, and later to the Welsh assembly. While assembly ministers thought Mrs Pinnington acted "quickly, successfully, and with clear professionalism to ensure practice and procedure were put on a proper footing" (ie ensuring that Anne-Marie was entitled to the same resuscitation procedures as any other child), her sacking was outside their responsibility.

At an employment appeal tribunal in February last year, Mrs Pinnington won a review of the original ET decision to kick the case into touch on legal technicalities. But she lost the full hearing last April after the panel ruled that she had an "unjustified sense of grievance" and that the council's two internal inquiries – which claimed there was no non-resuscitation policy – "were thorough and detailed".

This was not what the assembly had found and ignored the appeal tribunal's finding that her dismissal was in breach of contract. And Patrick Green, the pro-bono barrister who took up her case, listed 10 pieces of evidence suggesting there *was* a no-resuscitation policy. He said there was no possible basis for the ET to have made the findings it did; and after hearing only part of his argument,the judges sent the case for appeal.

In the City

THE phoney pharaoh Mohamed Fayed is no doubt (so far) quietly fuming over the elevation of Michael Howard as new leader of the Conservative party. Fayed blames Howard for both the official inquiry into his purchase of Harrods that exposed his financial fantasies and rewriting of history, as well as the initial refusal of a British passport. Fayed has made repeated and fanciful allegations that Howard, when trade minister, was paid up to £1.5m by bitter rival "Tiny" Rowland of Lonrho to appoint inspectors from the Department of Timidity & Inaction in 1987.

These claims were examined and rejected by the parliamentary commissioner for standards in 1997, but this has never fazed Fayed. Particularly because in 1994 it was Howard, then home secretary, who was at least nominally involved in the decision to refuse the pharaoh his beloved British passport.

Howard has tried in the past to offload that decision on to his then junior minister Charles Wardle, who later went to work for Fayed (though not for very long). However, the evidence is that it was very much a decision taken by home office officials on the basis of the highly critical DTI report and accepted by Howard – as far as the pharaoh's passport went.

Wardle has always refuted Howard's version. He indicated to the Commons that it was in fact Howard who asked him to examine the possibility of finding a way round the DTI verdict to give a passport to Ali Fayed, the pharaoh's brother. "I was asked to find a way of reversing a decision by nationality division officials," the MP declared in a June 1997 adjournment debate. The former Tory MP explained that although he had accepted the officials' decision he had been "instructed to pursue further references that might be favourable to Ali Fayed" – believed to be a reference to the Bank of England which ironically had already banned both Fayeds from being directors of the Harrods Bank. Both Wardle and his successor Sir Nicholas Baker agreed with the officials that they could not ignore the "highly adverse criticism" contained in the DTI report. Ali Fayed did later obtain his British passport.

What infuriates Fayed on both counts is that Howard was a distant cousin of Harry Landy, a Rowland associate who on one occasion after the Fayed takeover spoke to his cousin at the DTI on the subject of the pharaoh's alleged anti-semitism. Howard is understood to have mentioned the relative connection/problem to colleagues at the home office at the time the passport decision was pending. Landy – who died in 2001 – always denied seeking to lobby Howard and the former minister always denied being influenced. Both sides agreed that there had been little contact or friendship between the two men after Landy was jailed for five years in 1979 over the 1974 collapse of the Israel British Bank (Landy ran the London end).

Landy's conviction was overturned in 1980 because of serious flaws in the six-day summing up at the end of the 90-day trial. Rowland supported Landy in his appeal and they continued to work together afterwards. Landy is said to have been angered by Howard's coolness once he became an MP in 1983. He claimed to friends that his companies, which included London City & Westcliff Properties later acquired by Lonrho, had been supportive of Howard when he was a young lawyer. That connection could have cost Howard earlier selection for a safe Tory seat given the impact of the Israel British scandal. Either way, look out for Fayed sounding off on Howard.

SINCE he departed for Switzerland last March, rumours that Fayed is a seller of the Ritz hotel in Paris and more recently Fulham or even Harrods have continued to circulate.

The brothers Barclay, owners of the Ritz in London, are said to be interested in the hotel or perhaps the Knightsbridge store. Fayed always rebuffs such stories and suggests these trophies are anyway worth astronomic figures. But just how much is the Ritz worth, with its latest annual loss of £2.6m and near £100m debt to Royal Bank of Scotland? Three years ago the Ritz hotel-owning company acquired a Luxembourg company, Champli, which owned two Paris properties valued at £19m in a share swap. Champli was itself a shareholder in the Ritz with a 23 percent stake – both companies were controlled by Fayed from Jersey. But the Champli accounts for 1999 filed in Luxembourg as part of the 2000 deal show that it had written down the value of its stake in the hotel by almost two-thirds to just £11m, valuing the whole Ritz company and thereby the hotel at just £48m! And given the performance since then and the admitted poor prospects, would that value be much higher today?

But despite total losses that exceed £100m, the Ritz still manages to provide a useful way to finance the pharaoh's lifestyle. Last year he received advances from the company for personal expenditure of £250,000 compared with £176,000 the previous year. Although these were all repaid before the year end so as not to become defined as director's loans and thereby taxable as a benefit, there is little doubt that these payments would have attracted the attention of the UK taxman. Fayed has taken almost £1m out of the Ritz this way in the past four years.

However, any plans the phoney pharaoh may have to sell the Paris Ritz are unlikely to have been helped by the latest results. These continue an almost unbroken run of losses since he acquired the Parisian landmark almost 25 years ago. The figures for 2002 compare with the optimistic forecast made in September last year that the loss would be reduced. It rose by £100,000 to £2.6m as occupancy rates slipped again to just below 75 percent and revenues crept up £1.2m to £39.6m. And there is worse to come. With almost ten months of this year completed, Fayed forecasts "the net loss will increase".

Fayed's biggest burden at the Ritz, as at his Harrods flagship whose results are due later this month and are not expected to make happy reading, is the debt he has piled on both business – in part it is suspected to finance the unearned dividends extracted from Harrods and recycled back into that even bigger loss maker, Fulham. Last year that Ritz debt helped push interest charges up substantially to £6m.

Two years ago Fayed refinanced his borrowings at the Ritz with an eight-year 141m euro facility from Royal Bank of Scotland which had already loaned him £350m secured on Harrods. That Ritz euro loan now translates to £97m. Any buyer of the Ritz or Harrods would have to assume the RBS debts thereby greatly reducing the amount paid into Fayed's offshore pockets. Which may explain why no deal.

MEANWHILE over at Fulham, it is no big surprise that Thai premier and telecom tycoon Thaksin Shinawatra should display interest in buying the Premiership club into which Fayed has sunk almost £100m for no financial return.

More surprising was Fayed's rejection of the offer. He owes Thaksin big time. The Thai government has done Fayed some valuable favours in the past year or so over the pharaoh's struggling oil interests in the Gulf of Thailand.

Fayed has been looking to bail out of Thailand for some time. He has gained nothing from an investment of more than $40m since 1998 in the four offshore oil and gas concessions other than a small and not really viable gas find.

Last year Thaksin attracted criticism in Thailand when he agreed to give Harrods Energy another year to begin drilling on one key block. Exploration should have begun in September 2001 and Fayed faced a $1.8m fine for non-performance or possible loss of the concession. Thaksin explained the extension – previously rejected by a government panel – on the grounds that there were technical problems related to an environmental impact study. Conditions regarding another offshore block were also eased.

Thaksin denied all this had anything to do with his friendship with Fayed who had visited him more than once and lobbied hard for his support. Fayed had sought Thaksin's intervention, not just on the extension but also to encourage US oil giant Chevron to join up with the pharaoh and takeover the exploration obligations.

And the Thai prime minister repeated the favour in June this year when another concession – which had notionally expired in October 2002 – was extended for not one but three years to 2005. Fayed is now supposed to invest $1.3m in surveys and drilling.

Not that the favours have all been one way.

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG

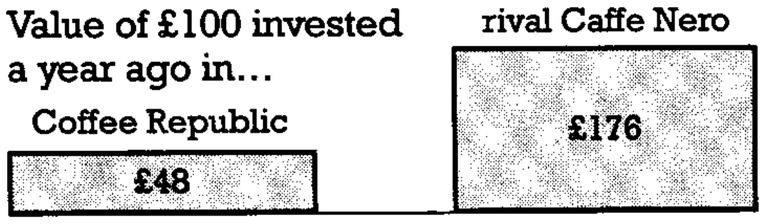
LOOK AT THIS— SLAVERY, EPIDEMICS, DOMESTIC SERVICE, CHILD LABOUR...!
THERE'S NO DENYING IT— WE'VE GONE RIGHT BACK...
...TO THE GOLDEN AGE OF CAPITALISM!
POP!
POP!

Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

Short measures at Coffee Republic

Value of £100 invested a year ago in...



Fayed is said to have provided a helicopter for Thaksin to use during his election campaign. He is understood to have also reduced an estimated £350,000 bill run up with Harrods by a senior member of the Thai royal family. He had also extended his usual generous hospitality to several Thai officials on visits to London.

Thaksin has declared that he continues to be interested in buying Fulham. He may be reading the Fayed game as a seller and soon. Fulham's planned return to Craven Cottage next year raises questions over the proposed redevelopment of the ground for which he received a £15m up-front but refundable down payment last year. Then there was the £8m loan – believed to be from GE Capital – due for repayment in August. And only further cash injections from the Fayed offshore cheque book look likely to keep the club afloat. So despite the premiership club's successful start to the season – Fayed, whose match visits are restricted by his decision to go non-resident – may still need to sell.

THE Rothschilds are becoming ever more involved in resolving the problems of their new found friends among the jittery Russian oligarchs. As highlighted in *Eye* 1083 earlier this year, Lord Rothschild had been cosying up to oil baron Mikhail Khodorkovsky of Yukos well before he fell out with Russia's President Putin.

Lord Jake helped facilitate robber baron Khodorkovsky's search for respectability by taking the well trodden philanthropy route. Now Khodorkovsky is in jail facing tax and fraud charges, it has emerged that Rothschild in part controls the votes on his 60 percent stake in Yukos, mostly now frozen by the Russian government.

Meanwhile rival oligarch Oleg Deripaska of Russian Aluminium has also allied with Lord Rothschild and his son Nathaniel in a bid to resolve a little local difficulty: the lack of a US visa. Deripaska was refused a visa three years ago. He has not applied since for fear of a second rejection. His problem is suspected to be the involvement in Rusal – another major shareholder is Roman Abramovich – of Mikhail Cherney, described by law enforcement agencies as linked to Russian organised crime. Cherney denies the allegation and has never been charged; but still Deripaska embarrassingly does not have a US visa. He is, however, free to visit Britain and has now recruited Rothschild junior to help resolve the US problem. Meanwhile there is said to be a £40m budget for good works, some of which have already been seen here with the sponsorship of an historic chess set exhibition in conjunction with – Lord Rothschild.

'Slicker'

Number crunchings

60%

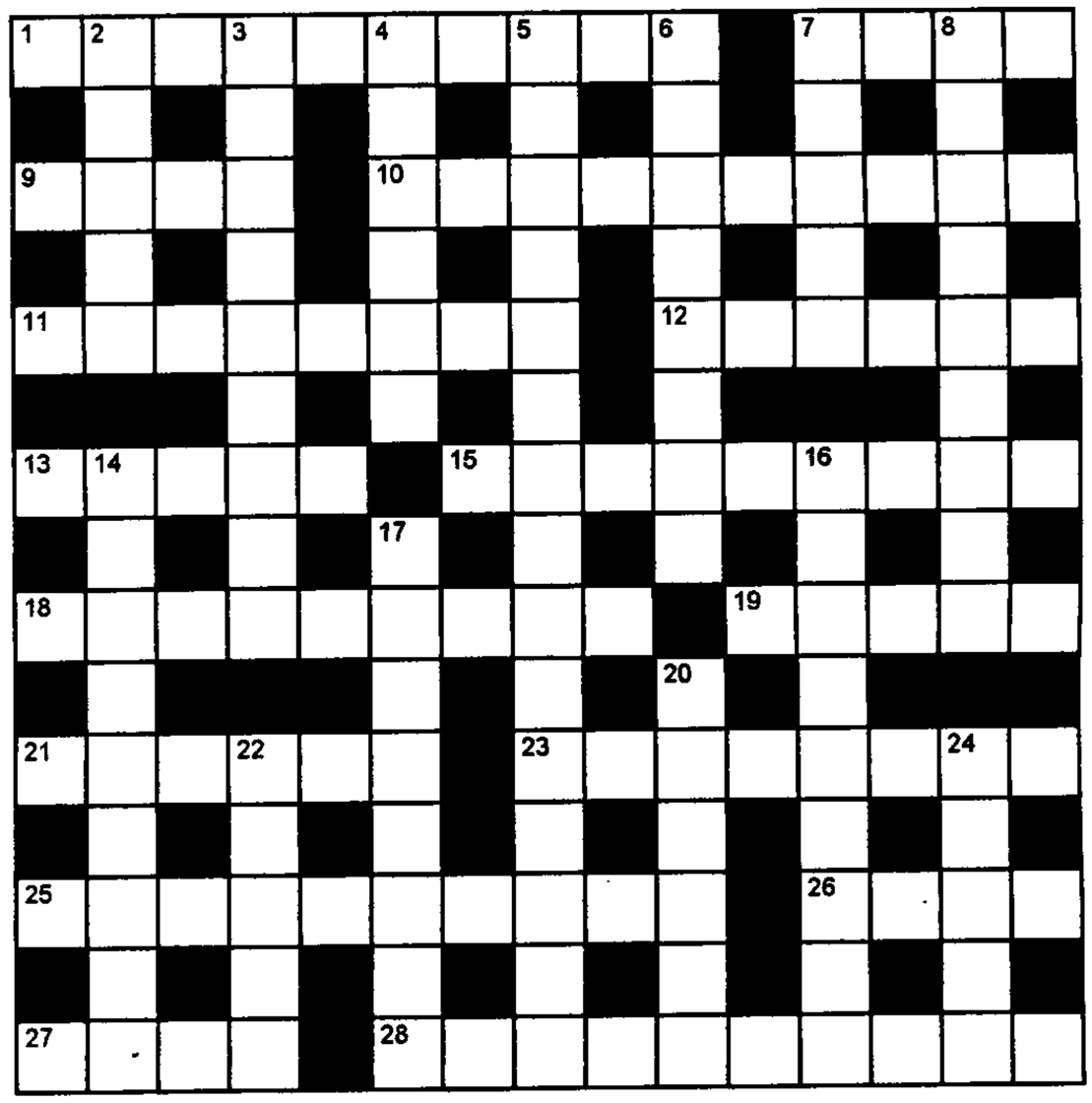
share in Burmese business which British American Tobacco has sold to pull out of the country

100%

number of BAT brands which will be made in Burma under licence and from which BAT will profit

EYE CROSSWORD 248

by Cyclops



£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 21 November 2003.

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk

ACROSS

1 "Destructive arms limitation? No ta, leave it out!" – Blair's and Bush's thing? (10)
7 Given new top, clasps tits (4)
9 Do a Piers Morgan – perverted bore (4)
10 Twist and cut off balls of Blair aide? (4,6)
11 Condemned Saracen sure did ditch Fergie (not hard) and primitive urges (8)
12 Shifty Blair not right, no, for Britain (6)
13 Having dipped end of todger in butter, it's no long tender (5)
15 Hint: he's broken with it, being surrounded by crap (2,3,4)
18 It checks those who go beyond the limit, getting pissed, wearing thong (5,4)
19 Attractive female who's willing to have child with Conservative – no alternative (5)
21 Livingstone will, reportedly (somewhere for the mutt during the hols?) (6)
23 US agents in street, one turned over Bill – "pain in the rear" (8)
25 One American to another: "Take out half of commie with missile" (10)
26 Cyclops gets to make out – it's child play! (1-3)
27 Doubtful erection saint got rid of (4)
28 Crap controllers rubbished script she devised about North (10)

DOWN

2 Daily brain diet loses kid (5)
3 Stiff but lacking the will (9)
4 Stupid sailor's crap going topless (6)
5 A leader rejected, in short, is without depth (4,6,5)
6 Unstable Bush: "Damn! Time to replace new sloppy medical treatments" (8)
7 Patriarch, firm, wants poke outside (5)
8 Goolies twisted and crushed by great rock enthusiast (9)
14 Cheated and removed bodice, literally? (6,3)
16 Penultimate selection of names of colleagues Clare's got it in for? (5,4)
17 Broadcasting the tales of Linford Christie and his sort? (8)
20 Given a wee application, it's said, as an engine part (6)
22 Pleased to get new leader (number two's dumped here) (5)
24 Bound to give head to Brenda (5)

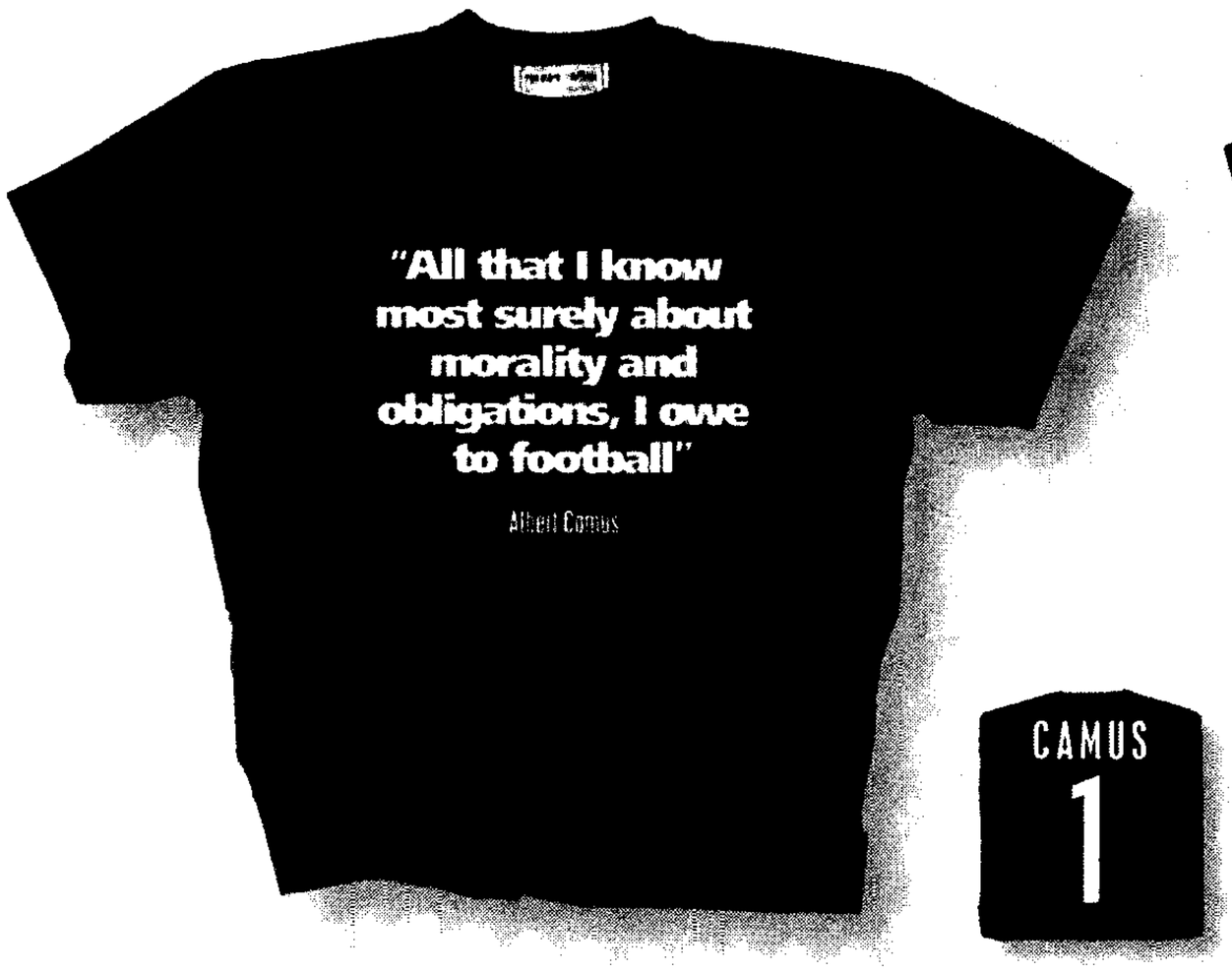
Crossword 247 winner: BASIL LISTER

ACROSS: 1 Olympus 5 Wankers 9 Wehrmacht 10 Korea 11 Rookies 12 Redhead 14 Doggie-fashion 17 Don't give a shit 20 Urethra 22 Swedish 23 Kabul 25 Erudition 26 Eyewash 27 Wise guy.

DOWN: 1 Onward 2 Y chromosome 3 Pommie git 4 Sucks 5 Watergate 6 Naked 7 Ear 8 Stands 13 Eroticising 15 Elizabeth 16 Hysterics 18 Junkie 19 Thingy 21 Hilda 22 Squaw 24 BSE.

YOBETTUS
HUSBAND
We've had a postcard from our Tammy in Ibiza
Aye, guess what, she's won the wet Tee shirt competition
Brill, I always knew that girl would do well!

Four Wise Men



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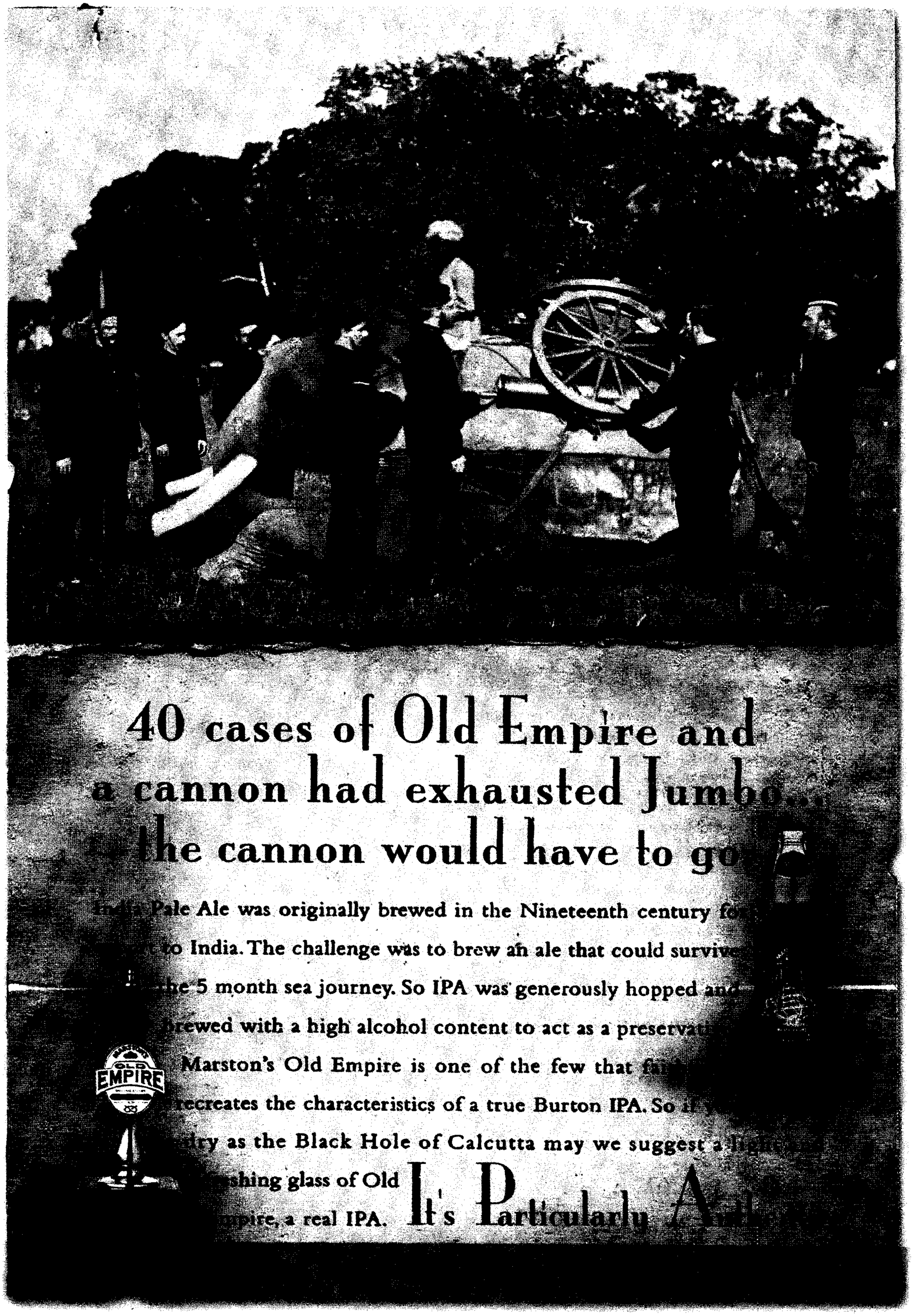
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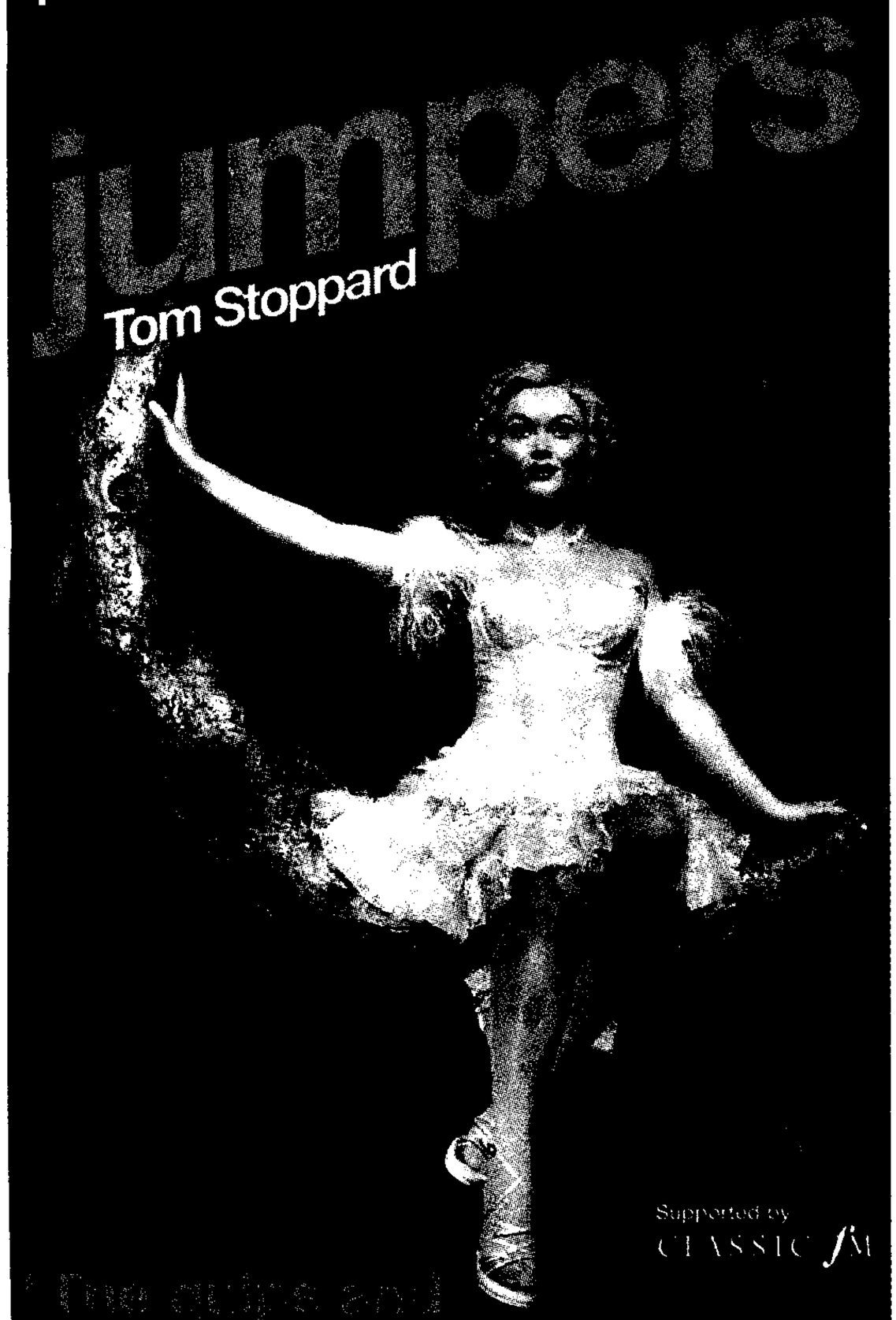

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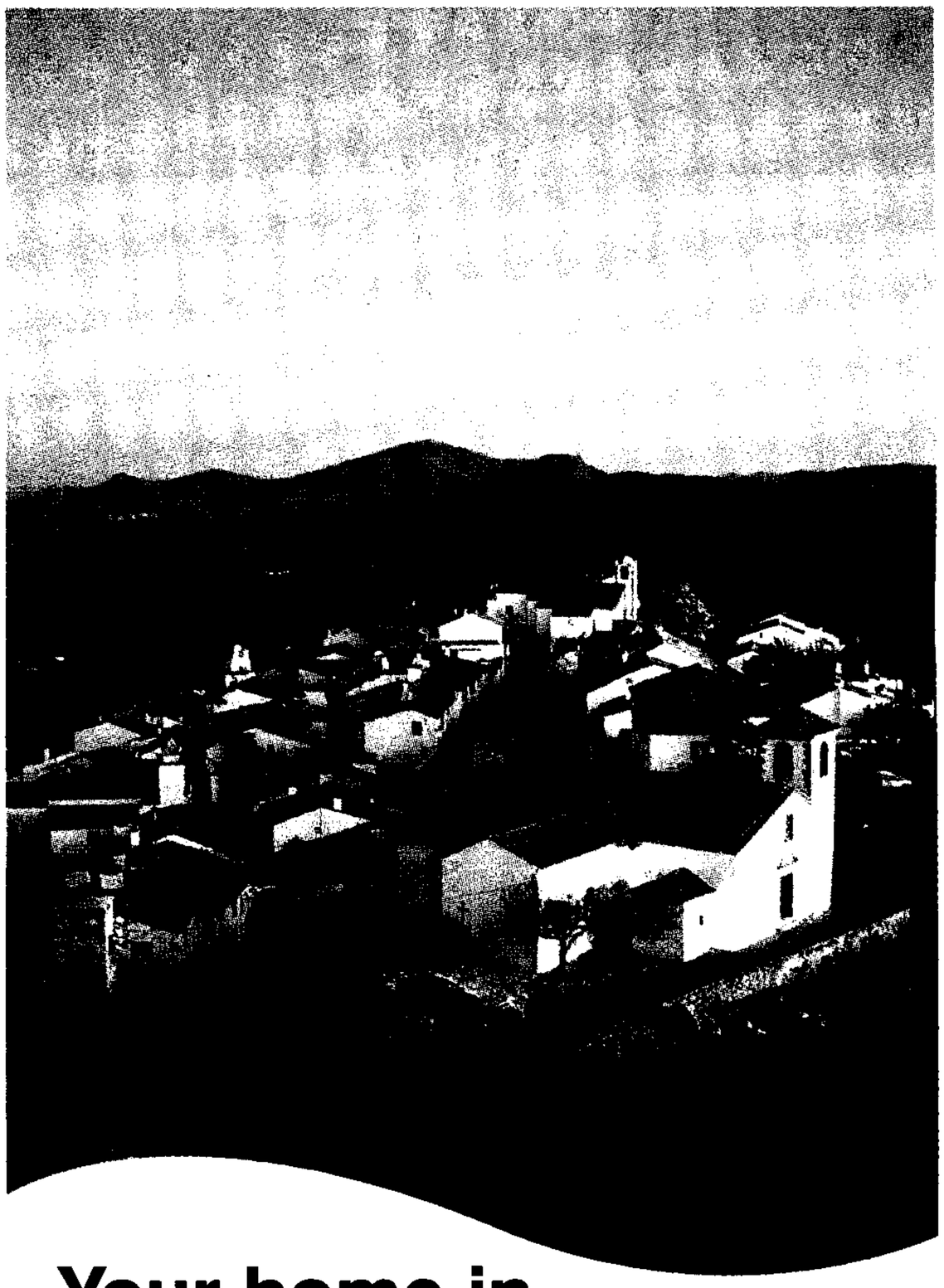

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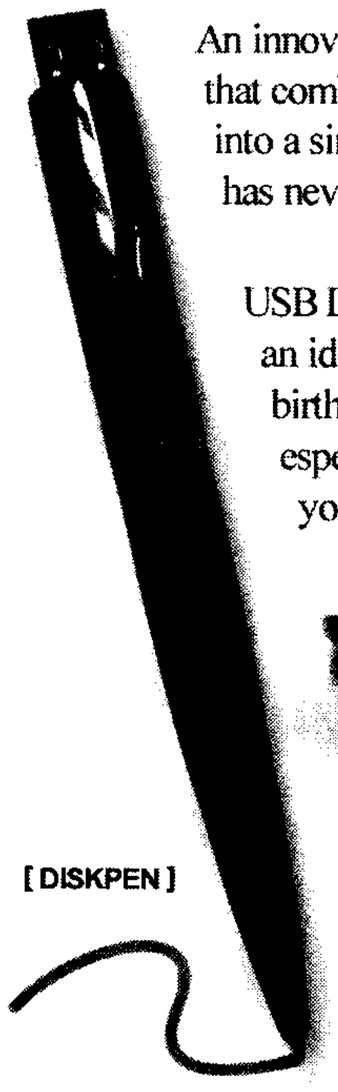

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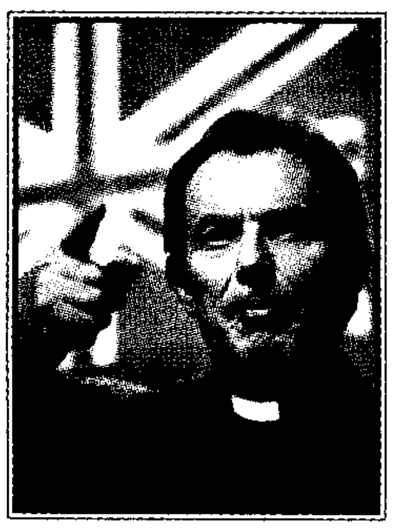

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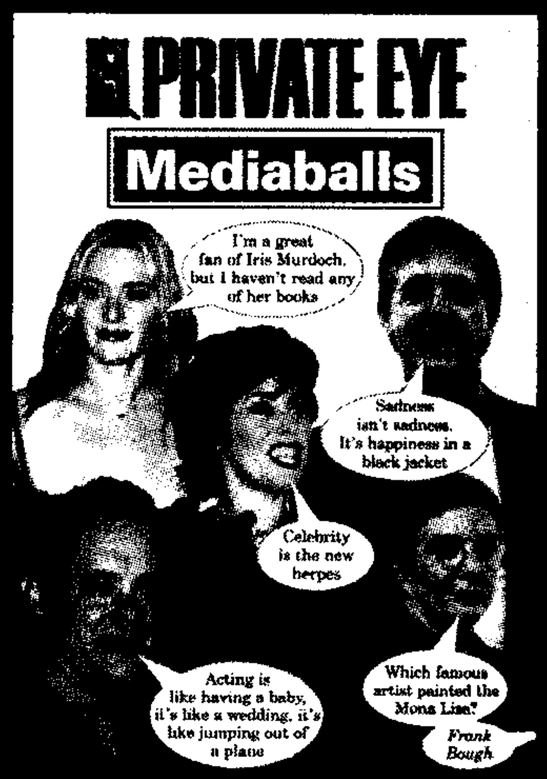
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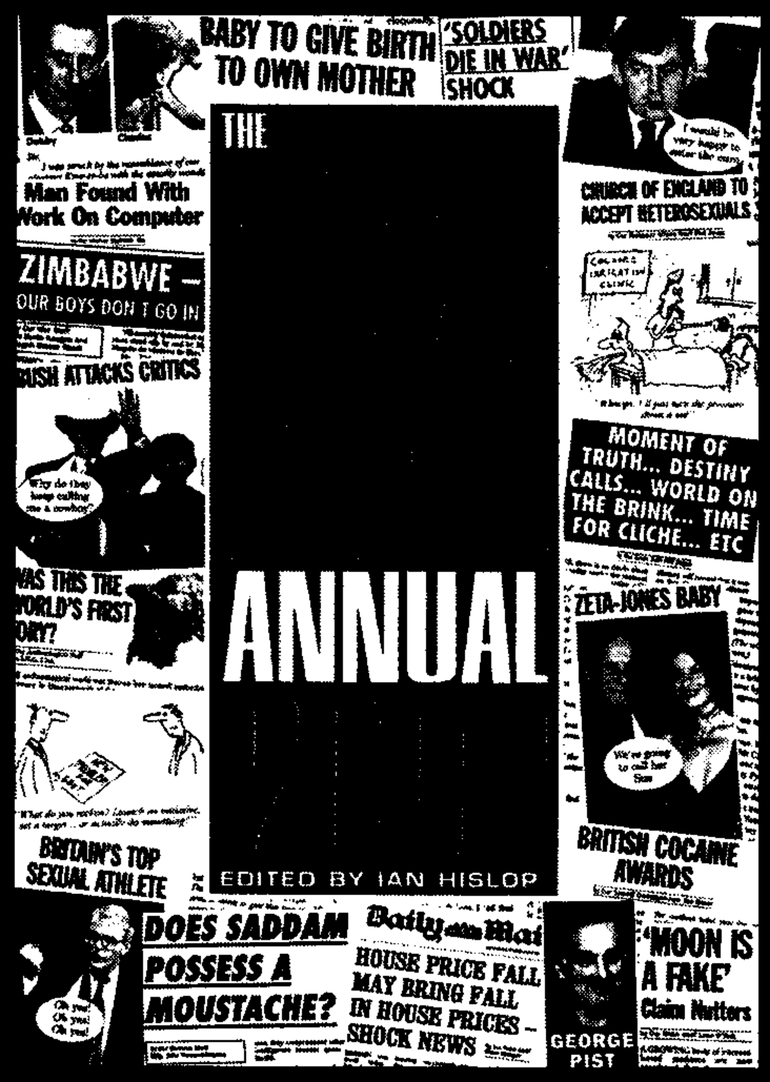
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'SOLDIERS DIE IN WAR' SHOCK
THE
Man Found With Work On Computer
CHURCH OF ENGLAND TO ACCEPT HETEROSEXUALS
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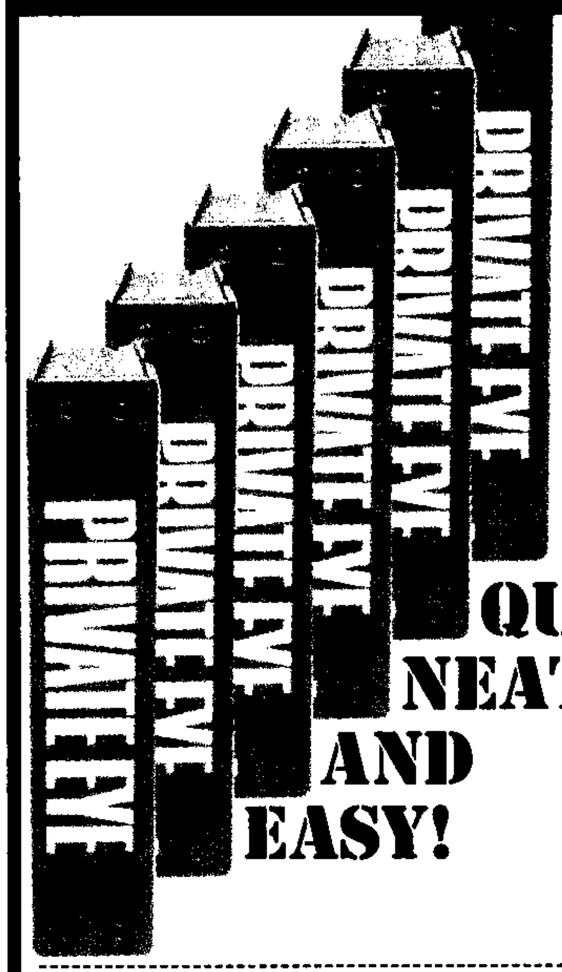

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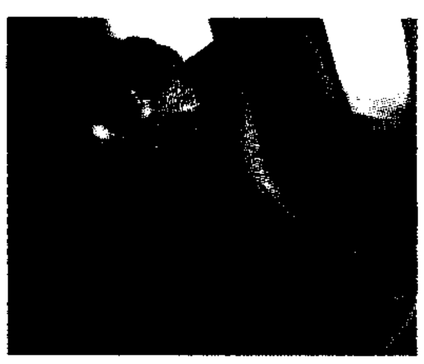

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